NORTH AMERICA'S **ONLY OFFICIAL** PS2 DVD

PS2 DEMOS INSIDE

7 PLAYABLE DEMOS! BLACK • OKAMI • GENJI • AND MORE!

OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

1UP

PS3 WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

THE

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 103 (April 2006)

DARKNESS

+

3 MORE PS3 GAMES!

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

STRANGLEHOLD

-

THIS JUST IN!

GOD OF WAR 2

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA
ISSUE 103 APRIL
$9.99 U.S. $12.99 Canada
Display Until April 10
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PlayStation 2
GREATEST HITS
ATV Offroad Fury 3
PlayStation 2
GREATEST HITS
Jak 3
NAUGHTY DOG
PlayStation 2
GREATEST HITS
Sly 2
Band of Thieves
PlayStation

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE TO MATURE
E-M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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HITS
A STRAIN
PlayStation 2
GREATEST HITS
HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!
PlayStation 2
GREATEST HITS
RATCHET & CLANK
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GENCO

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes

XBOX

PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE

$10 rebate for The Godfather DVD Collection in every game.*

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COMING SOON
TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
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ISSUE #103

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GOD OF WAR 2

COVER STORY

THE DARKNESS

PAGE 44

"BLOOD IS PRETTIER IN THE NEXT GENERATION."

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence

INPUT

16 **INPUT**
You talk too much—but we love you for it.

HYPE

22 **ROYAL TREATMENT**
The *Prince of Persia* team moves on to the PlayStation 3.

28 **THE OPM INTERVIEW**
Psychonauts' Tim Schafer is a rebel with a cause.

54 **PS3 PREVIEWS**
Smokin' hot previews of three more PlayStation 3 games!

64 **PSP PREVIEWS**
Tekken and *Killzone* get shrunken down, and Konami tries out some comic innovation.

68 **PS2 PREVIEWS**
Japan's answer to *Grand Theft Auto, Okami's* exclusive demo, and *Ballers* goes Hollywood.

REVIEWS

PS2

76 Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence
78 FIFA Street 2
78 MLB 06: The Show
78 Torino 2006
79 Fight Night Round 3
80 Drakengard 2
80 Sonic Riders
80 Tokyo Xtreme Racer Drift
81 24: The Game
82 25 to Life
82 Beatmania
82 Final Fight: Streetwise
83 Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure
86 Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams

PSP

88 Metal Gear Acid 2
89 Pursuit Force
89 WRC: FIA World Rally Championship

90 Exit
90 Fight Night Round 3
90 Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max
92 Street Supremacy
94 Samurai Warriors
94 Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code
95 Generation of Chaos

REPLAY

100 **TALKING BLACK**
Insight into the exclusive PS2 demo straight from the guys who made it.

104 **PLAYSTATION TACTICS**
There's more to tactical gaming than the world of *Final Fantasy*.

106 **WIRELESS COUCH POTATO**
Too lazy to look all the way across the living room? Then watch TV on your PSP instead!

108 **WAY OF THE GUN**
The best—and worst—games for you to practice your lightgun skills on.

P.S.

110 **IN MY DAY**
Believe the hype.

OPM.1UP.COM

PlayStation 3! PlayStation 3! The expectation, the rumors, the hype—people keep talking and speculating, but what do we *really* know? Visit consolewar.1UP.com for all the latest information on the system, the launch games, and when we'll actually get to see them all.

Also coming up is the March 16 launch of *Final Fantasy XII* in Japan. Read 1UP's corresponding cover story about what the game is like, with new information and segments unveiled every day for a week!

If you're excited after reading the cover story about *The Darkness*, you'll find lots more exclusive material from the game, including screens and interviews, coming in the month of March.

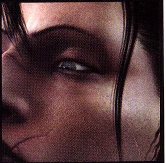
And last but certainly not least, *OPM* is excited about the next generation in more ways than one. Intrepid editor Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen has procreated and is now experiencing the joys of fatherhood—stop by scooter.1UP.com to see how life amidst diapers and midnight feedings is going.

GAMES COVERED INSIDE

PS3
44 The Darkness
60 Medal of Honor: Airborne
62 Stranglehold
54 Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom

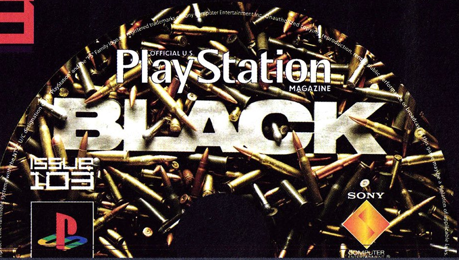
PS2
81 24: The Game
82 25 to Life
82 Beatmania
100 Black
86 Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening
80 Drakengard 2
78 FIFA Street 2
79 Fight Night Round 3
82 Final Fight: Streetwise
72 Kingdom Hearts II
83 Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure
76 Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence
78 MLB 06: The Show
71 NBA Ballers: Phenom
70 Okami
86 Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams
80 Sonic Riders
80 Tokyo Xtreme Racer Drift
78 Torino 2006
68 Yakuza

PSP
90 Exit
90 Fight Night Round 3
95 Generation of Chaos
65 Killzone: Liberation
88 Metal Gear Acid 2
66 Metal Gear Solid Digital Comic
89 Pursuit Force
94 Samurai Warriors
66 The Silent Hill Experience
90 Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max
92 Street Supremacy
64 Tekken: Dark Resurrection



94 Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code
89 WRC: FIA World Rally Championship

#103


OFFICIAL U.S.
PlayStation
MAGAZINE
BLACK
ISSUE 103
SONY
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

BLACK

Sample the story mode or try the new "test of valor"—either way, you'll have all the action-packed gameplay you could want.

ON THE DVD

IT'S RAINING BULLETS...

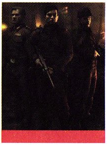
WELCOME TO OUR WORLD

One of the things we pride ourselves on is bringing you the latest and greatest demos the gaming world has to offer. That is one of the benefits of reading the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, which you are holding right here in your hands.

This month we're excited to bring you the amazing demo for *Black*, so you too can share in the love of guns. Then delve deep into the world of Japanese myths, legends, and calligraphy with *Okami* before making your way through the '70s in *Driver: Parallel Lines*, complete with proper attire, vehicles, and a nice mullet. Or perhaps taking to the skies in an F-15C Eagle or the F/A-18C Hornet is more your style? *Ace Combat* will let you do it.

It's all here, so what are you waiting for? Grab the disc and get to your PlayStation 2.

PLAY IT!

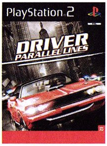


COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

Get a feel for how this game plays with these two levels, or view the trailer for a sampling of commandos in action.

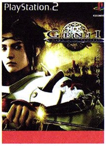
OKAMI

Picture this: You are a god in the shape of a wolf and you're hanging out with a fairy while using calligraphy to make the world a better place.


PlayStation 2
DRIVER
PARALLEL LINES

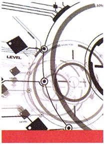
DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

Parallel Lines shows you how nothing beats a good set of wheels as you escape the strong arm of the law.


PlayStation 2
GENJI

GENJI: DAWN OF THE SAMURAI

Sample what it's like to be a samurai, ready to defeat a corrupt clan that rules Japan and to restore honor to your family.



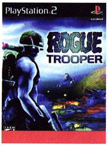
BEATMANIA

Let your inner DJ loose with this demo for *Beatmania* as you drop beats and create the pulsing energy of a club in your very own home.

ACE COMBAT ZERO: THE BELKAN WAR

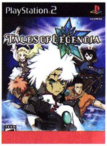
Videogame air superiority has been achieved. Sample the demo here on this disc. Go on, you know you want to.

WATCH IT!


PlayStation 2
ROGUE TROOPER

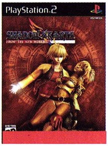
ROGUE TROOPER

Longtime fans of *2000AD* comics will remember this one. Check the trailer to see how well the title translates into the gaming realm.


PlayStation 2
TALES OF LEGENDIA

TALES OF LEGENDIA

Did you know this game features artwork by Kazuto Nakazawa, best known for his animation sequence in *Kill Bill*?

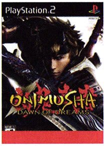

PlayStation 2
SHADOW HEARTS
FROM THE NEW WORLD

SHADOW HEARTS: FROM THE NEW WORLD

Shadow Hearts includes stuff you won't remember from history, but don't let that keep you away!

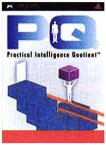
OKAMI

Go behind the scenes and get a closer look at this beautiful, hand-drawn world where calligraphy can be your powerful weapon of choice.


PlayStation 2
ONIMUSHA
DAWN OF DREAMS

ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS

Last month you got the demo. Now find out more about *Dawn of Dreams* from the team behind the game.


PSP
PQ
Practical Intelligence Quotient™

PQ: PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT

Find out how adept you are at solving logic problems in the brain-challenging PSP game *PQ*.

ACE COMBAT ZERO: THE BELKAN WAR

PlayStation
BLACK
ISSUE 103
SONY

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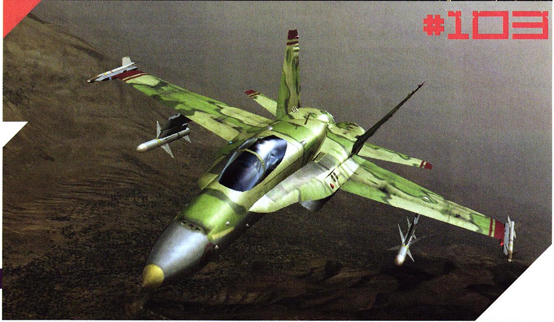

Nothing is more exhilarating than taking to the skies in some of the most powerful aircraft in the world, and *Ace Combat* is the king when it comes to delivering stellar action in the flight-sim genre. Take a moment to see how well the series is doing with this month's demo for *The Belkan War*, which takes place some 15 years prior to the events of the last game. This is standard fare for the *Ace Combat* series, but don't read that as a negative thing, as jumping into one of the many craft—including the F/A-18C Hornet in this demo—and loading up on some powerful missiles just never gets old. By the way, while the F-15C Eagle is a more well-rounded aircraft, the Hornet is better for the ground-based objectives of this demo mission. Remember to load up on some air-to-ground missiles such as the SOD to make things a little easier, too.

OFFICIAL U.S.
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MAGAZINE
ISSUE 104
SONY
NTSC U/C

#104
COMING NEXT MONTH

PLAY IT!

- TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
- FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3
- ARENA FOOTBALL
- PLUS: A SPECIAL COLLECTION OF MUSIC-THEMED DEMOS

WATCH IT!

- ROGUE TROOPER
- THE GODFATHER
- HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY
- APE ESCAPE ACADEMY
- DAXTER
- BAND TOGETHER

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STAFF

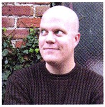
THE OPM FAMILY

TOM BYRON

is so excited again. *The Darkness, Medal of Honor: Airborne, Stranglehold,* and *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom* are merely the tip of the massive PlayStation 3 tsunami that's about to hit, and so much more is yet to come. While he patiently waits (E3 is only two months away!), Tom will happily continue to play *Samurai Warriors: State of War* on his PSP (a system which, he wants to point out, finally has a ton of good games. Huzzah!). Oh, and Scooter having a baby—that excites Tom, too.

DANA JONGEWAARD

was very excited to go to Sweden for the first time to see *The Darkness*, even though Sweden in February is very, very cold. But after asking the locals, "Ursäkta, kan jag få lite öl?" she was able to battle the chilly winter elements just fine.



JOE RYBICKI

has PlayStation knowledge that is unparalleled, plus he's an astounding writer (his new column is already a hit). In appreciation, we've tapped him to write next month's cover story. (Shh, don't tell him yet. We don't want to ruin the surprise.)

THIERRY NGUYEN

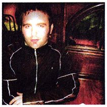
seen a bird! And by bird, we mean a new baby daughter, as opposed to an old baby daughter. The long nights of playing games will now be accompanied by the cries of an infant and people finally realizing that Scooter's a dad.

GIANCARLO VARANINI

wants to say "congratulations" to Heather this month for rocking the business at SC, and no, he doesn't mean *Soul Calibur*. You're the best. In other news, seagulls are annoying and gang up on other birds to steal food. That sucks.

LOGAN PARR

is addicted to Chinese food. He is scouring San Francisco for the absolute best and spicy Hunan food he can find. Do you have a recommendation? Catch his blog at logans_run.1UP.com and let him know so he can compare your findings to his own.



RYAN VULK

would like to give a big shout-out to the Memento crew. There are too many names for him to throw out all at once, but you know who you are, sportin' the very sensual pink pearl above your heads. It's a talented crew that's above the rest. Word.

ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA

wants to toast to all of you for making this moment (amongst others) possible at the 1UP awards party. And yes, he and Ryan do look quite hot in this picture! (Although he is hotter thanks to his very snazzy sweater vest.) L'chaim!

EXTENDED FAMILY

NICH MARAGOS

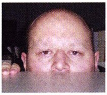
moved to San Francisco for the high-flying, laissez-faire life of a videogame freelancer. Recent deficits in the high-flying and laissez-faire departments have made him reconsider.
debaser.1UP.com

GREG FORD

was recently named the copy chief for the Ziff Davis Game Group. But he even more recently quit that job to go work with his buddies over at *EGM*. Drop him a line of congratulations!
egm_ford.1UP.com

ROBERT ASHLEY

comes from Texas, where they grow their game reviewers tall and snarky. He also makes music in not one, but two different bands. He's multifunctional like that.
robertashley.1UP.com



GREG SEWART

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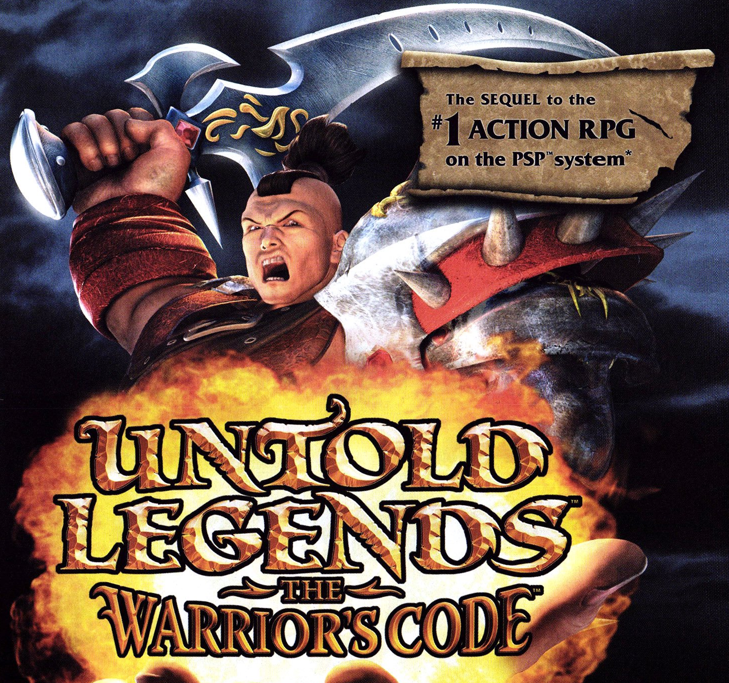
What Dark Beast Lurks Within You?



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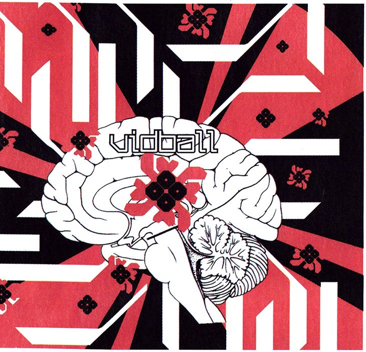

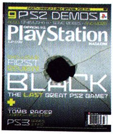

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

One day I thought up my own game system. It doesn't exist, but in my mind it does, and I am frequently creating games for it. It's really cool because all the things I hate about some games or wish for in others... well, all I have to do think up that game that I would like to play. It is a nice feeling of oppressed power. I call the system the Vidball. I also created a handheld system called the Vidpad because I couldn't resist.

The Lost_Potato
Via e-mail

CELEBRITY WATCH!

Devil KINGS
PlayStation
BURNOUT REVENGE

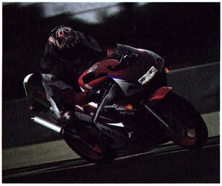
FUMITO UEDA, SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS DIRECTOR, LOVES OPM!

SPARDA: TOTAL WARRIOR

Throughout the *Devil May Cry* series, I have always found the best character to be often the most overlooked one by fans: Sparda. He's the man who kicked the ass of hell all by his lonesome. He's the father of the series' hero. He left the legendary weapons that ran amok in *DMC3*. And upon playing *DMC3: Special Edition*, I have found the closest thing to proving to you how unbelievably awesome of a hero he is: Super Sparda. That was the series' highlight for me. Sparda: Best *DMC* character. Can I get a "Hell yeah"?

O'Reilly Flowers
Colorado Springs, CO

Q&A

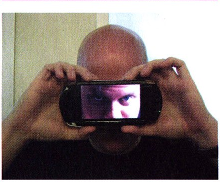


1. Love the new format for the 100th issue.
Well, that's great. Thanks! We do, too.
2. What's up with all the late demos in Issue #101?
It actually takes longer to put together the DVD than it takes to put together the magazine, and sometimes demos don't make our deadlines. Sure, we'd love for all our demos to be timely, but we also think demos are cool no matter when you get them.
3. Could you do the "Track *Gran Turismo 4*" thing for *Tourist Trophy*? This game needs hype.
We're pretty sure anything that comes from Polyphony is going to do well.
4. Ever thought of collecting the best demos and shoving them all on one demo disc?
Yes, as a matter of fact, we have! Wish we could say more.
5. With regard to Gamers Are Talking About [a sidebar in Input] in Issue #101, can I get a trip to ChickenNext's house to try to dethrone the so-called biggest *Tony Hawk* game fan? I would put up a challenge.
ChickenNext, what say you?
6. When is *GT4 Mobile* coming out?!
That's an excellent question.
7. Can you put this e-mail in your mag so I can brag to all my friends how I'm in a magazine and they're not? I'll give you a dollar. :)
Yes—now pay up!

Keep up the good work. Ever since Issue #19 (my first), I've been hooked on *OPM*. It's a drug....
Just say no! Er, scratch that.

Kevan Bingel
Via e-mail

HUNTING FOR LOVE



I am a longtime reader of your magazine and love it. I just wanted to say I love your new sections like In My Day and love what you are doing for the gaming community. Can't wait for the next issue; you give me something to look forward to every month.

Hunter Miller
Via e-mail

Thanks! In My Day is senior editor Joe Rybicki's new monthly column found on our P.S. page at the end of every issue. You can contact Joe and any of OPM*'s columnists through OPM@ziffdavis.com.*

MORE Q&A

1. Can you make *Kingdom Hearts II* the cover of *OPM* again and have about a 20-page review of it?
Sorry, no more covers, but you can bet KH2 *will get a feature review in an upcoming issue. Word from Square Enix is that the game hits stores March 28.*
2. Is there going to be a playable demo [of *KH2*] on any future *OPM* DVDs?
Sadly, no. According the Square Enix, no demo is in the works.
3. Is there someone at *OPM* who can translate Japanese and will be willing to come to my house and sit for countless hours while I play *KH2* and translate the Japanese version for me? Or do I have to wait a big two months for it to come out?
No, but March 28 is coming sooner than you think.

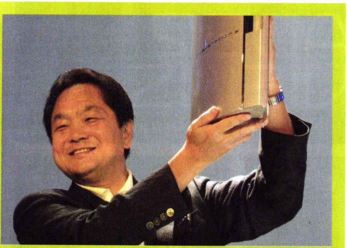
Thanks. *OPM* ROCKS!!!
We can't say no to that.

Jared McMullin
Via e-mail

PENNY ARCADE OFFENDS

I've been an *OPM* subscriber for more than five years now and really enjoy it. But I take

GAMERS ARE TALKING ABOUT
STRAIGHT FROM THE OPM MESSAGE BOARDS (BOARDS.1UP.COM)



R U E?

Is the PS3 really coming this year? Seems like only yesterday that the PS2 entered our lives. In the thread entitled "I want the PS3, but there are so many games I still haven't played for the PS2," **Itchybrowndog**'s not sure he's emotionally ready for the next generation:

"I can't wait for the PS3, but I love my PS2—it goes everywhere with me. It almost feels like I'm cheating on my PS2 when I think of the PS3. Does anyone else have this problem, or is it just me?"

"You're not the only one," agrees **shibbydashang1**. "When the PS2 was released, there were still so many PS1 games that I wanted to play before moving on. So I waited a year and half to get a PS2. In that time, I was able to play the PS1 games I wanted and got a PS2 when its priced dropped from $299 (plus, I didn't have to buy a buggy first edition)."

Botkiller, always the pragmatist, offers some accidental comfort: "Call me crazy, but I don't see a problem playing current and next-generation games at the same time."

Knight_cloak isn't worried: "I have plenty of games for my PS2 I could play for the next five years and not be bored."

FROM ME TO YOU

Dear Everybody,

These Input pages may not reflect it, but our February cover story featuring Hideo Kojima stirred an enormous reader response and debate. At center was Kojima-san's feeling that games are not art. He couldn't possibly have known the beehive he would stir.

But it was a beehive with bit of honey. The games-as-art debate took on a life of its own, arguments flying back and forth like at a pro tennis match. The liveliness and spirit of the dialogue was invigorating, intelligent, articulate, and well thought out. Sure, the occasional "That's just your opinion, and like derrieres, everyone has one" or some similar attempt to shut people up slipped in. But it was to no avail.

That's what rigorous discussion is all about: People having insights, taking positions, challenging each other, and making the rest of us think—a good break from the usual "When's *GTA4* coming out?" questions we normally get. Thanks for all your letters and e-mails regarding the Kojima interview. It's gratifying to know *OPM* readers can be so passionate and articulate.

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Here's something subscribers may not know: You can log on to service.playstationmagazine.com to check your subscription status, change your mailing address, report missing issues or other problems, and even pay for or renew a subscription. Neat.

Take care,

Tom Byron, Editor-in-Chief

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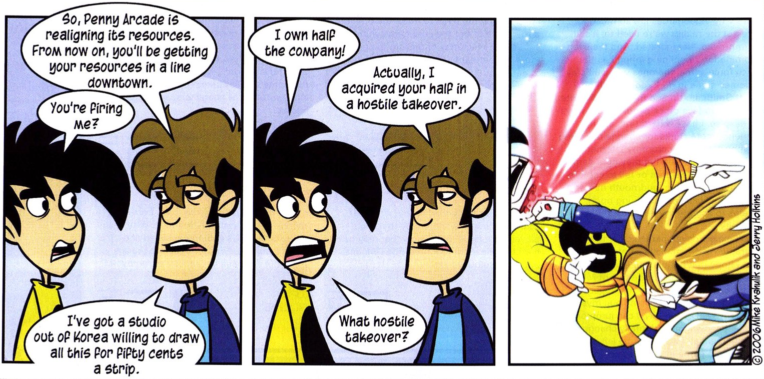
So, Penny Arcade is realigning its resources. From now on, you'll be getting your resources in a line downtown.
You're firing me?
I've got a studio out of Korea willing to draw all this for fifty cents a strip.
I own half the company!
Actually, I acquired your half in a hostile takeover.
What hostile takeover?
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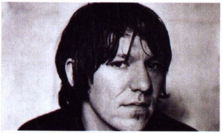
offense at your decision to run [web comic] *Penny Arcade* uncensored. I do think that *Penny Arcade* is a funny strip and have enjoyed it in the past. But *OPM* is a magazine for all kinds of gamers and people. There are parents who would never let their kids watch an episode of *South Park* but who get their kids subscriptions to your magazine with a certain trust. Unlike videogames that have a rating on the front, there is no indication that *OPM* would not be suitable for kids. I work with teenagers at my church and I would normally not have a problem letting them borrow my copy of the magazine, but [foul language] is not a necessary part of a videogame magazine.

Mark Hill
Oklahoma City, OK



ONLY THE LONELY

I'm all for innovation, as I am all for international understanding and friendship, both of which are exemplified by online gaming. I am, however, concerned that developers will eventually forget that there are those of us that do not participate in online gaming, not because we dislike the games or we can't afford the subscription fees, but because we are antisocial. And when I say antisocial, I mean genuinely antisocial, not Goth-style, Ally Sheedy-in-*The-Breakfast-Club* types, those who say they're antisocial only so that other "antisocial" people will hang out with them. There are those who actually do dread existing in the same tangible reality as other people but don't have the strength of will to end it.

That's why videogames are so much fun: They're not the reality we're used to; it's filtered, improved, exaggerated. And the eventual domination of online gaming has the ability to force some, the ones who still play videogames alone in dark rooms with only an Elliott Smith album and Big Gulp of Sprite as company, to face other people in the ways we so despise. I have a hard time asking convenience store clerks for change or calling tech support when my crummy Internet service goes out. But when I'm playing a game and happen to miss a shot or fail to capture a certain flag and some loudmouth named SeXMachine69 calls me an "F-ing noob," it only helps to solidify my desired avoidance of humanity.

I don't expect developers to cater to a small demographic of emotionally stunted consumers, but I hope that good single-player games don't fall by the wayside as the tide of MMORPGs or online sports games takes over the industry. Maybe one day, when I pull myself out from my well of self-pity, I can jump on the online bandwagon and totally change my tune. Until then, all I want is to be left alone with a fun solo game in which to get lost.

Nick
Via e-mail

READER REVIEWS

DOWN WITH FINAL FANTASY FANBOYS

SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE

LATE TO THE PARTY: SOCOM 3

WHAT YOU SAID

I have been a huge fan of the *SOCOM* series since the first game. I have always enjoyed the realism of lying in wait for enemies, etc. I have to disagree with you on *SOCOM 3* being the best of the series. The online portion of *SOCOM 3* is the best, hands down. But the single-player portion suffers greatly from the technique of "dumbing down" the game. The actions that you can get your team to do have decreased in number. A command as simple as "lead to" isn't included in this installment. I'm also disappointed that you can't send your team to [certain areas to have them perform] specific actions in the field. I understand the need to make the online portion better, but the core game shouldn't suffer at the expense of making the game more mainstream. | *Big Rick*

READER SCORE
MULTIPLAYER 4.5|5
SINGLE PLAYER 2.5|5

WHAT WE SAID

"Now, here's the kicker. Ready? You are actually going to want to play the single-player campaign, too! I know that may be hard to believe for longtime *SOCOM* fans, but it's absolutely true."

OPM SCORE 5|5

Helter Skelter
4781
1454
356
1728

FAN SERVICE: WILD ARMS 4

WHAT YOU SAID

Wild Arms has always taken a backseat to grander RPGs, but it's always been able to please both its fans and newcomers that are drawn into the series. But seeing the horribly biased review of *Wild Arms 4* by a *Final Fantasy* fanboy wasn't what I, or many other fans of the series, expected in *OPM* [Issue #101]. Though the game is very linear and does focus a little too much on RPG clichés, its battle system is exceedingly pleasing and a nice change from other standard RPGs.

Your reviewer must have not even played more than four hours of the game, and after looking at his page on 1UP.com, I must say his collection is centered on *Final Fantasy*. If the game were called *Final Fantasy Arms 4*, I'm sure it would have gotten a 5 out of 5. I feel *Wild Arms 4* is really well done overall. You will be hooked by the game's beautiful environments, great customization of characters, and wild battles. | *Mat Cobbett*

READER SCORE 3.5|5

WHAT WE SAID

"The *Wild Arms* series has gone from merely banal to actively irritating. With such a wealth of RPGs getting translated and more companies eager to get into the act, it's about time this appendix was removed."

OPM SCORE 1.5|5

Want to have your say about a recent game? Think you can do better than us? Send your review (don't forget the score!) to opm@ziffdavis.com with the subject "READER REVIEW."

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BLOG OF THE MONTH

Leonora is a hardcore RPG gamer, having put in over 40 hours on such classics as *Suikoden II*, *Suikoden III*, and *Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne*. In her latest posting, she weighs in on the RPG game-length debate:

"I noticed while wandering around 1UP that many people have the opinion that an RPG with a main quest that lasts 28 hours is 'short.' Then I came upon this quote in 1UP's *Grandia III* review:

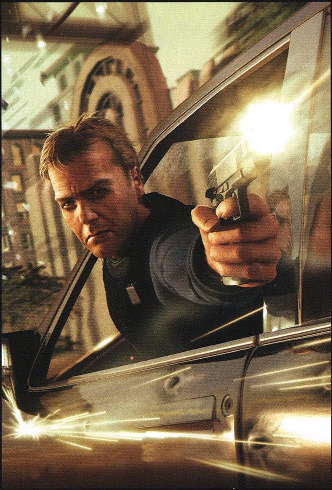
"'That must be the cardinal rule in the RPG handbook: "Games should take no less than 50 hours to complete." I'm fine with that rule, if there's actually compelling content for 50-plus hours. In the case of *Grandia*, it's closer to 35, but it's a pretty brilliant 35 hours overall, making up for the remaining lackluster 15.'

"I think this rule is a major problem in RPGs right now, and I agree with [1UP reviewer Jane] Pinckard that games should reach or surpass this length only when there is a real reason for them to."

Leonora
leokitty.1UP.com

CLUB OF THE MONTH

Tomb Raider and Lara Croft fans will find kindred spirits here at one of the hottest clubs on 1UP. *Angel of Darkness* fans welcome, too.
tombraider-club.1UP.com



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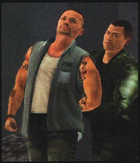
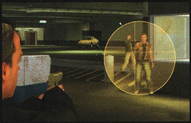


Interrogate and conduct surveillance on suspects



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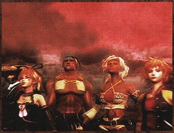

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HYPE

PREVIEWS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PLAYSTATION

44

THE DARKNESS

PS3 BLACK MAGIC!

28 PSYCHONAUT
Tim Schafer spills the beans.

34 THE RETURN
John Davison on the PS3.

36 PAUSE
When you're not playing games.

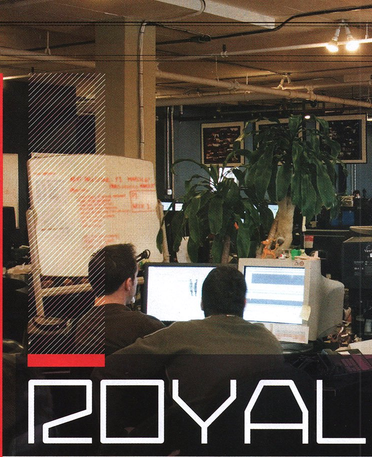
40 J-TOWN
Grand Theft Auto: Tokyo.

42 CALENDAR
The month for you and your PS2.

44 PS3 PREVIEWS
The games are coming!

64 PSP PREVIEWS
Can you say "*Killzone*"?

68 PS2 PREVIEWS
Wolf gods and celebrity ballers.



ROYAL

Expectations: Sometimes they can be unreasonably high. But at other times, they can help to motivate a group or individual to go above and beyond the call of duty. With the excellent *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* under its belt, among other games, Ubisoft's Montreal studio is currently facing such a situation. How do you live up to such high expectations when you're working with a brand-new property, called *Project Assassins*, on a brand-new system? "It's a very experienced and strong-headed team," says executive producer Yannis Mallat. "The pressure comes from the pedigree of the team. My job here is to make sure that we don't have outside pressure, because the team itself always tries to break the rules and cross frontiers—it has its own pressure coming from the inside."

"It is internally driven," says Jade Raymond, the game's producer. "The two main lead guys defining the main character, the assassin, created all the moves for the Prince, and they have this vision of what a next-generation character is going to be like and the amount of control the player has. They set the bar really high for themselves."

Even with the internal challenges the team has been giving itself in the development of *Project Assassins*, jumping from the PS2 to the PS3 presents its own unique set of hurdles. "From my perspective, I think it's riskier because of the scope and money involved. We have to be sure and more confident about where the money goes, and we also have a lot more people," says Mallat. "On the creative side, nothing is really different. Since we don't have that many constraints, we have to give ourselves our own constraints because whatever the RAM budget is, whether it's 32MB or 512MB, it's still a limit."

"We're kind of lucky, because I inherited the core team that shipped *The Sands of Time*," says Raymond. "We have people who have seen many different consoles, so they've been through the challenges of new technology. Also, they've all been creating games for a long time and they all have an idea of what 'next generation' is."

But it's not as if the Montreal team isn't familiar with challenges or taking risks. In fact, much of what the team learned from its time working on *Prince of Persia* has been applied to the development of *Project Assassins*. "Most of the things that went well are on the human and philosophical aspects," says Mallat. "The team loved the philosophy of the engine—in terms of how we work with it and the level editor, it's a global creation where everyone participates. It gives more time for back-and-forth to check ideas and it fits with this team. On *Project Assassins* we've kept the same processes that we had on

MEN AT WORK
The Ubisoft Montreal team is hard at work creating a brand-new engine that harnesses much of what the PlayStation 3 offers.

TALENT

THE MONTREAL STUDIO, CROWN JEWEL OF UBISOFT'S EMPIRE, TACKLES PS3 DEVELOPMENT

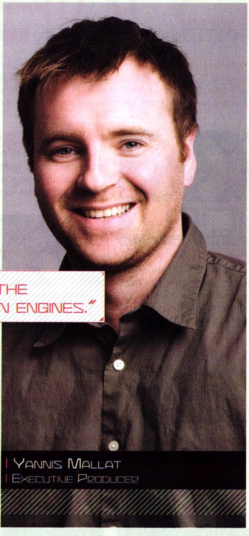
Sands of Time by giving the team enough preproduction time to be able to test the ideas within the gameplay or within playable versions of the game."

That wasn't the only way the team benefited from working on *The Sands of Time*. Despite the struggle against Ubisoft management at the time, the end result afforded the team a great deal of respect in the company, which has given it much more freedom in the development of *Project Assassins*. "I was a producer on *Sands of Time*," Mallat recalls. "I had to struggle with upper management and had to tell them, 'I'm not done with preproduction, even if this is the best prototype you've ever seen. If we rush into production, we're going to get screwed.' Ultimately, what's right for the people is right for the company. We have more freedom in terms of creativity. Obviously, we're dealing with a new IP and we've had more time and that's great. But we also need the challenge."

> "YOU MIGHT FIND NEXT-GEN GAMES ON THE MARKET, BUT THEY'RE USING OLDER-GEN ENGINES."

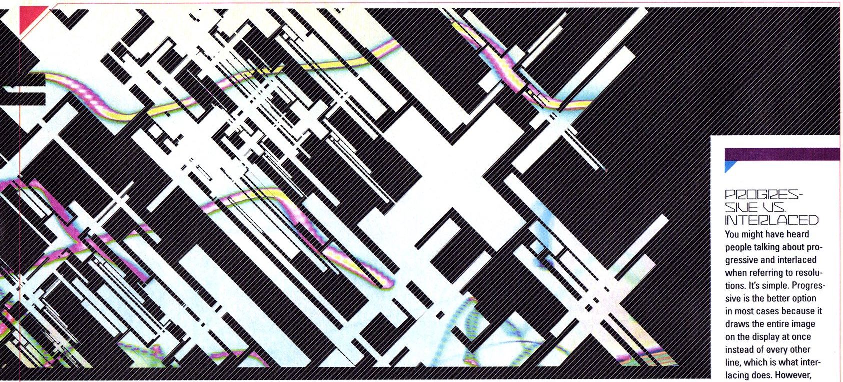
Ubisoft Montreal is not only taking on that challenge, but also defining what that will mean for other developers on the PlayStation 3. "I've asked the team to create an entirely new next-generation engine, and this is where the challenge is going to be," Mallat says. "You might find next-generation games on the market, but they're using older-generation engines. But when you're talking about real next-generation engines, this is where our game really profits, and we'll be showing that soon."

"We knew that we were going to leverage the graphics potential to get a new level of realism, but we're also leveraging the Cell architecture to get more AI, smoother animation, and all this stuff," Raymond explains. "We're really focusing on crowd AI and creating new types of gameplay with crowd interaction. Some of that is really hard to get to work off the bat because sometimes the simulations can take on a life of their own and produce something you weren't expecting. We have many different layers in the crowd AI system because we're trying to build a sandbox where you can interact with the crowd when you're not on a mission. We also want to have a lot of level-design components where the crowd [will behave accordingly]." Frankly, we can't wait to see all of this in action. |



| YANNIS MALLAT
| EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

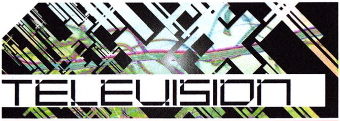
| JADE RAYMOND
| PRODUCER



PS3 WATCH

THE HIGH-DEFINITION REVOLUTION

Ever wondered what the heck progressive scan is or what an HDMI port does? Do you know the difference between LCD, plasma, and DLP displays? Do you really even need an HDTV for your PlayStation 3? These and other questions are becoming more common lately and will be even more prevalent in the weeks leading up to the launch of the PlayStation 3. This guide is meant to give you a general overview of what you should be looking for and what terms you should know going into the next generation.



TELEVISION

CRT (Cathode-Ray Tube)

CRTs are the standard TV sets you see in most households and can come in projection and standard display modes. While they can offer a very clean, vibrant, and crisp picture, many are not HD capable. They're also incredibly heavy and expensive compared to front- and rear-projection TVs powered by LCD and DLP technology.

DLP (Digital Light Processing)

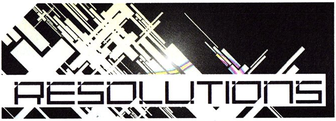
This high-definition technology is essentially an evolution of LCD technology. In most cases, it provides a more vibrant picture with better color display (most LCD TVs have problems displaying black colors as truly black). DLP offers all of the other benefits of LCD technology as well, but some consumers have noticed a rainbow color effect on some DLP TVs that could be potentially distracting.

LCD (Liquid Crystal Display)

While LCD technology was severely lacking in quality in previous years because of blurring problems, recent advancements have made it the most affordable and reliable technology. Plus, you don't have to worry about burn-in and you get a really amazing picture with minimal blurring.

Plasma

Avoid it. Plasma TV technology is way too expensive and touchy to really make it worth your time. Yes, in many cases it can provide an amazing picture, but there are far more reliable and inexpensive technologies that can provide you with a great HD experience.



RESOLUTIONS

480p

It's the lowest progressive-scan resolution out there and is available on most TVs, but it is not considered an HD resolution.

720p

This is the main HD resolution and probably the one that most PlayStation 3 games will be coded for. Surprisingly, a lot of early-model HDTVs don't display 720p natively; such sets would have to convert the signal to another resolution in order to display it properly.

1080i/p

It's the highest resolution of most currently available sets, though many can only display up to 1080i since 1080p sets have just started to hit the market.

PROGRESSIVE VS. INTERLACED

You might have heard people talking about progressive and interlaced when referring to resolutions. It's simple. Progressive is the better option in most cases because it draws the entire image on the display at once instead of every other line, which is what interlacing does. However, there's some debate as to whether or not something like 720p is better than 1080i, because the former option gives you progressive scan while the latter gives you a higher resolution that's interlaced. Ultimately, it comes down to your own taste.

GET CONNECTED

The PS3 will have a connection port called HDMI along with the standard audio/video jacks. You can hook up a PS3 through standard audio/video jacks by using component cables, which are usually sold separately. However, HDMI is a better alternative to component cables because there's less degradation in the image quality; you just have to find a TV that has an HDMI jack. If your TV has DVI, which is essentially the same as HDMI but without the audio component, then you can purchase an adapter to make it work.

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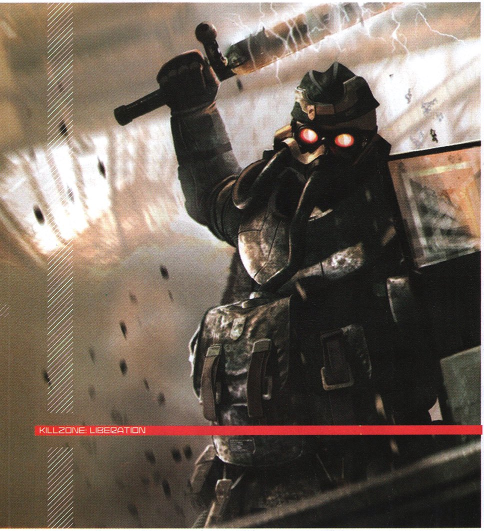
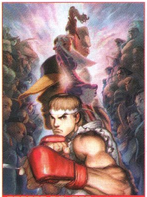
TRENDSPOTTER

POTENT PORTABLES

Pretty much all of us expected popular PlayStation franchises to appear on the PSP at some point, but what surprises us most is the incredible surge within the last few months. It makes sense—if you want a game to sell, be it portable or otherwise, a familiar name can go a long way. After all, look what it did for the president of the United States, and he's not even a videogame—though he does occasionally stutter like a poor framerate. Anyway, here's to the influx of big names on the PSP and the inevitable lack of creativity to follow!



KILLZONE: LIBERATION



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TEKKEN 5: DARK RESURRECTION

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL ESSENTIALS

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BLU-LIGHT SPECIAL

SONY PICTURES TALKS BLU-RAY PRICING

While we all eagerly await Sony CEA's official pricing announcement for the PlayStation 3, we can try to get a good idea as to what it may cost by looking at its individual components, or at least speculate how much of a loss Sony is willing to absorb on each PlayStation 3 sold. In early January, Pioneer revealed that it'll be releasing a $1,800 Blu-ray player. Samsung announced plans for a $1,000 player. It's highly unlikely that the PlayStation 3—which also serves as a Blu-ray player—will cost over $1,000, but you can bet that Sony will try to reinforce the idea that you're paying far less for something that normally costs over a grand. That's all well and good for the hardware, but what about pricing for the Blu-ray discs?

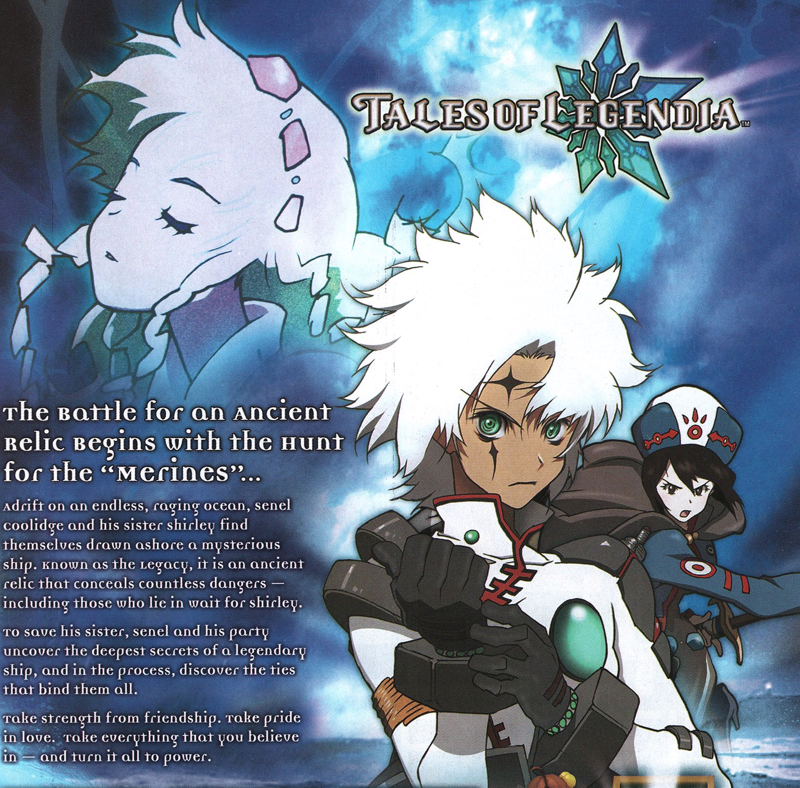
Interestingly, Sony Pictures announced that it will charge retailers only $23.45 for every new-release Blu-ray movie disc, which is about a 20 percent markup over DVD technology. Movies currently available on DVD that are rereleased on Blu-ray will be sold to retailers for $17.95. Sounds like a deal, but don't expect this pricing to come into play for PlayStation 3 games, as most retailers, including GameStop and Electronics Boutique, expect them to retail for approximately $60—the same price as most Xbox 360 games, which are on regular DVDs.

GAME ENVY

WHAT WE WANT ON THE PLAYSTATION: CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

It's interesting how one of the most popular franchises on television, *CSI*, has yet to have any sort of adequate game based on its premise. Who wouldn't want to play as an investigator at the scene of a grisly murder, attempting to find clues and capture the killer? *Condemned: Criminal Origins* (Xbox 360) not only puts you in that role, but takes it one step further by making it as creepy as possible. Seriously, playing this game with the lights off and a 5.1 system cranked up is akin to walking on a narrow wooden bridge on top of a cliff with alligators in the river below waiting to munch on you (thanks, *Temple of Doom*!). Plus, there's something special about smacking a drug-crazed hobo over the head with a lead pipe that you ripped from the wall—no other game really lets you do that.

TALES OF LEGENDIA™



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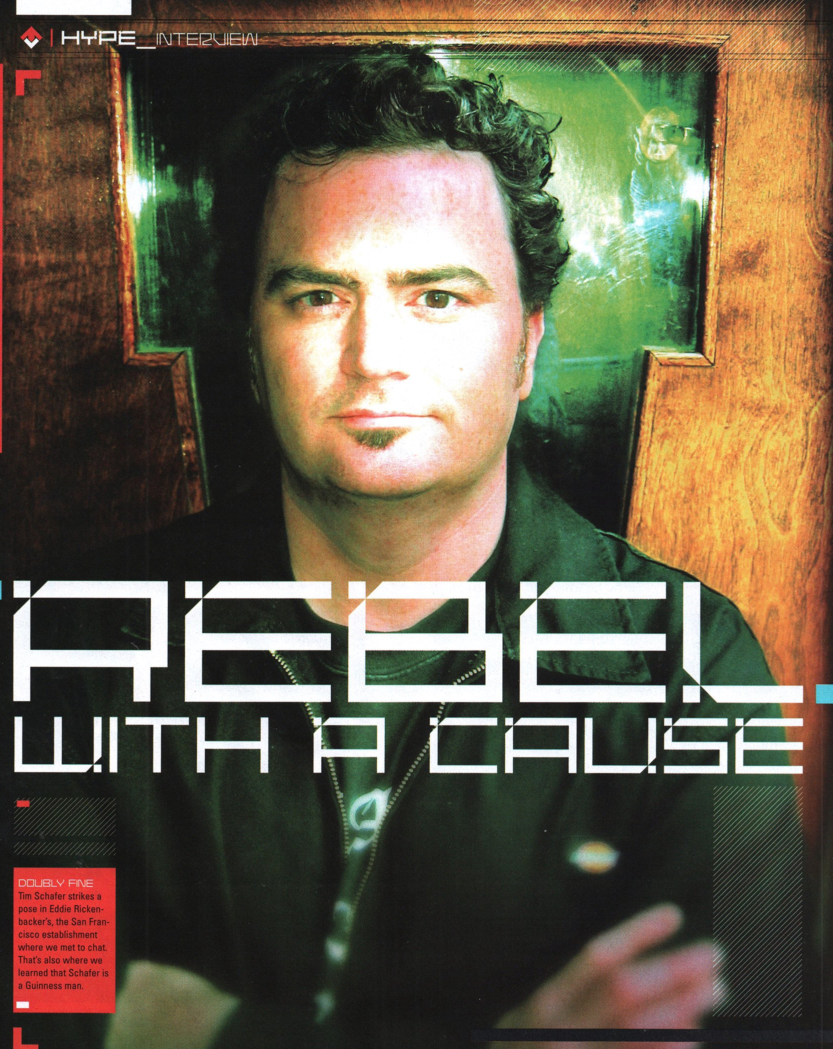


REBEL WITH A CAUSE

DOUBLY FINE
Tim Schafer strikes a pose in Eddie Rickenbacker's, the San Francisco establishment where we met to chat. That's also where we learned that Schafer is a Guinness man.

He's the closest the videogame industry has to a rebel, a man who sticks to his guns when everything around him is telling him not to, who bucks trends because he's not in this just to make a quick buck. No, Double Fine's Tim Schafer—designer of *Psychonauts* and *Grim Fandango*, just to name two—is out to entertain the masses in the best way that he knows how.

TRAVELING THROUGH
THE MIND OF TIM SCHAFER

photos by MERKLEY???

OPM Most people know about your roots as a PC adventure-game developer for LucasArts, but can you tell us a little more about the time before that? Where did you grow up and how did you get into games?
TIM SCHAFER I grew up in Sonoma, which is about an hour north of [San Francisco] in wine country. It's really a tranquil, idyllic, *Leave It to Beaver* kind of town. As a kid, I always thought it was kind of boring, and we were always left wondering what we were going to do. I remember [when] my dad brought home an Odyssey—it had cartridges you could plug in, and they were all basically versions of *Pong*, but you had these plastic overlays you could put over the screen. There was this submarine game, or at least they said it was submarine game, but it was really just the *Pong* paddles that moved around a maze. I loved that thing. There was this target game where you just shot the *Pong* paddles as they moved around. Everyone in my family played it. Then my dad brought home an Atari, and I freaked out over that. I played it, played it, and played it. I would even sit there and watch the attract mode of *Combat* with the biplanes flying through the clouds. Then I played *Adventure*, and I just loved the castle, and the dragons that looked like ducks, and the bats that looked like an H.

My brother, who is about nine years older than me, was in college at the time. He had a Teletype and some Teletype games. He would sit there and type his name and password to get into a mainframe, and everything about it seemed so cool to me. I thought it was exciting that you had to type in a username and password.

So I ended up going to school and getting into computers. Eventually, I was at UC Santa Cruz, and it had a pretty big effect on me because I was able to take a wide range of classes. Actually, it was all of the classes outside my major that [I found most interesting]. There was one class where we studied these people who would have problems in their lives. These problems would manifest themselves into dreams—so they'd see an animal or a lake or something crazy like that, and a lot of that is in *Psychonauts*. I thought it was really cool that people who weren't poets and writers could come up with stuff that was so abstract.

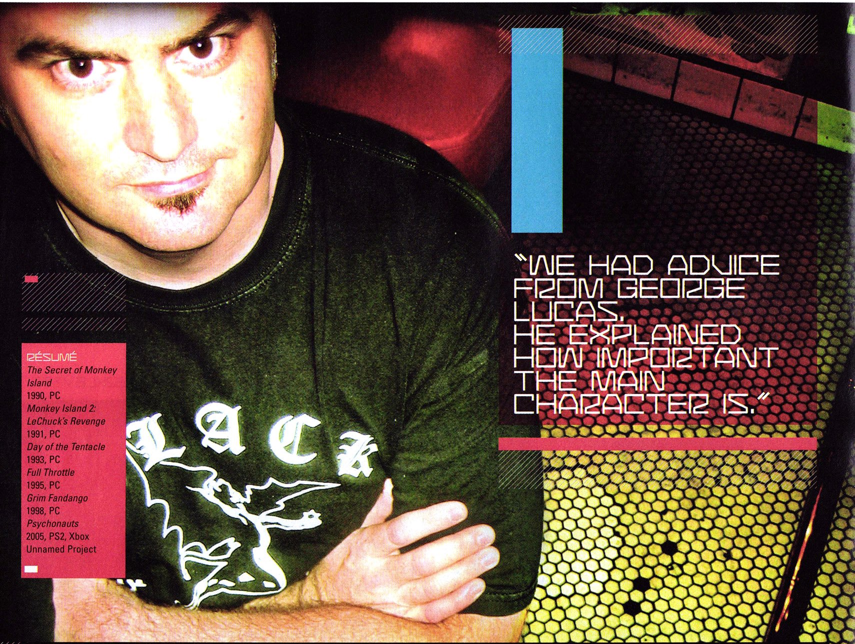
Eventually, I transferred to UC Berkeley. While I was there I took a lot of English classes, and that's where I started to read a lot of interesting stuff, like Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. I also loved my anthropology class and folklore class. We studied folklore from all around the world. I learned about the modern stuff, urban legends, and that's where I learned about the Day of the Dead, which became the inspiration for *Grim Fandango*. That's also where I learned the importance of knowing how to write. These folktales all have these really imaginative things that people have passed down, and every culture has them. It's a great place to rip things off. [Even things like *Star Wars*] are so heavily based in folklore.

OPM UC Santa Cruz and the surrounding area are kind of unique. It's pretty isolated. What did you think of the people there?
TS I remember when I went there, I didn't leave campus for three weeks because it's so self-contained. It's nice when you're a freshman because you don't have to get an apartment or figure any of that other stuff out. But we weren't really accepted by the town. One time we were riding the bus to the school from town, and this lady got up and told all of us, "Please don't vote. You're only going to be here for four years, so you'll mess up everything for the people that live here." I didn't buy that. But anyway, I was at the art college, Porter, where our first class was an overview of all this stuff—architecture, poetry, and music. I still ended up in computer science, but it definitely helped broaden my horizons, which is good when you're stuck underground in a computer lab.

> "AT UC BERKELEY, I LEARNED ABOUT THE DAY OF THE DEAD, WHICH INSPIRED GRIM FANDANGO."

OPM Because of your experiences at school, did you ever think that you didn't want to do the whole computer programming thing?
TS Originally, I wasn't really aiming to be a designer because it didn't occur to me that you could make a living in the game industry. I knew there were companies that made the games, but I never thought I'd get a job at one of them. I thought I'd get more and more into writing and less into programming. Plus, you always heard about the boring programming jobs. When you were looking for jobs, you never saw one for games, but you always saw listings for database work and things like that.

OPM How did you go from being a programmer to designing your own games at LucasArts?



"WE HAD ADVICE FROM GEORGE LUCAS. HE EXPLAINED HOW IMPORTANT THE MAIN CHARACTER IS."

RÉSUMÉ

The Secret of Monkey Island
1990, PC
Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge
1991, PC
Day of the Tentacle
1993, PC
Full Throttle
1995, PC
Grim Fandango
1998, PC
Psychonauts
2005, PS2, Xbox
Unnamed Project

| TS Well, a group of us were thrown into SCUMM University, because all of the LucasArts games used SCUMM [Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion]. The four of us were messing around with it, writing our own dialogue. They gave us some old art to work with, so we were just writing goofy stuff and joking around, trying to make each other laugh. I think LucasArts was watching us the whole time, and they picked me and one other person out and said that they liked the writing so they put us on the *Monkey Island* games. We were just so excited to be at Skywalker Ranch and to be around *Star Wars* before the *Episode I* stuff. I felt really lucky to be right out of school and going to a company like that.

Also, the old LucasArts team had like 40 people, and I thought they were all geniuses. They were all talented and always dedicated to doing smart and original stuff. And getting hooked up with Ron Gilbert—he was our mentor and I learned a lot from him. I also learned how to be creative and to not be afraid to throw around new ideas. I wrote this one joke thinking we were going to take it out, and he told us to run with it. That's when I learned to not be afraid, because sometimes your own self-censorship can be your worst enemy. No idea is too strange or too goofy.

| OPM Would you say that your experience at LucasArts was positive on the whole, or were there things that were pretty disheartening?
| TS I learned good and bad things, definitely. One of the hard lessons is learning how easy it is to be in a creatively driven environment and not be really worried about money. It's much harder [now] to do what we did in the old days—now we have to find that interception between what we think is cool and what will work for the audience. [As far as good things go], I had this standard set because of all the people there like Ron—that whole studio was about quality. Nothing got watered down. Plus, we had some advice from George Lucas. He didn't come around a whole lot, but he came around a few times. For *Monkey Island*, we didn't have a name for the main character. We just called him "Guy" because he was a guy. Anyway, George came around and explained how [important the main character is] and how you can put all of your eggs behind the main character and build everything else around that, make the whole story be that person's story.

| OPM Is that how you design your games?
| TS I've done both. I've heard that the Japanese developers make a cool character that works really well, then they think about the environment they can drop it into. It's different from the American design, where they build this huge crazy world, then [create] the characters and hope that it works. For *Grim Fandango*, I definitely wanted to bring this world to life and have all of these cool skeletons walking around. Then I thought about who would be the best character for the Land of the Dead. Conversely, *Full Throttle* was a story about a biker, so we thought about what kind of world we can we fit him in. It can go both ways.

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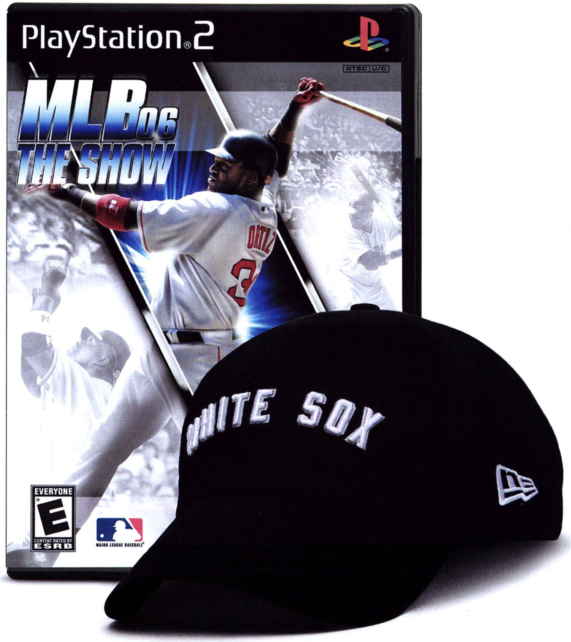

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"AMERICAN PLATFORMER CHARACTERS FEEL LIKE THEY'VE BEEN USED OR MOLESTED."

OPM People have said that about *Psychonauts*—that it has a Japanese design sensibility, in that the world was built around the character.

TS Well, it was definitely influenced by a lot of Japanese games, starting with *Zelda*, *Mario*, and *Mario 64*, which was a huge influence, as was *Skies of Arcadia*. It's not like we were ignoring Japanese games, because a lot of the games we admire are Japanese. For American games, I was not inspired by the shadow movement, or the movement to darken games. These developers think that [the old style] won't sell, so they ask how we can make our characters dark, and they just say, "Well, let's just throw him in a jail and have him be there for a long time." It seems so cheap. And for American platformer characters, which started off being so happy, it feels like they've been used or molested. They've been perverted and turned into these dark, supposedly more marketable, violent characters.

OPM Is that the biggest problem facing the industry? Everyone's out to make money and no one cares about the actual games?

TS I don't know. I'm not a marketing genius; otherwise, *Psychonauts* would've sold a lot more than it did. I'm worried about the superficial interpretation of [the audience]. If you hear one kid say, "I wish I had more guns," then all of a sudden all kids want to use guns. These kids aren't game designers. I'm not saying their opinions don't matter. I'm saying the obligation of game designers is to come up with something that's challenging and entertaining. They shouldn't just get a list of impressions from a focus group and go with that. I mean, it's like with *Tomb Raider*. No focus group sat around and said, "We want *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but with a girl." I just wish we had the luxury of having game design where you [the game designer] think something will be popular so you fight for it. People may not understand it, but you have to give them the chance to like it. That gets harder and harder.

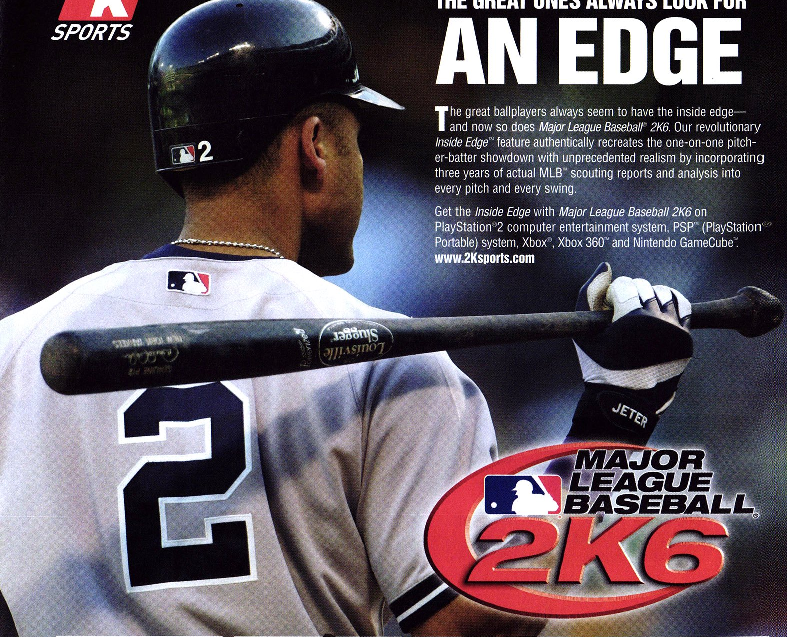
OPM Is there anything you would've changed during the development of *Psychonauts*?

TS I just wouldn't have been late. And there are lots of things I couldn't have known. I brought some key members on late in the project, when they probably should've been on the whole time. There was a lot of turmoil in getting a team together, but now it's like a well-oiled machine, and that's the great thing about starting on this new project. It's like you're starting with a dream team.

OPM Will Double Fine be supporting multiple systems this time around and not developing primarily for one platform? Can you tell us anything about this new project?

TS Our engineering is much more platform agnostic, so yeah, we're not going to be tied to one system. The new project is different from anything I've done before, but it's something I've wanted to do for a long time. We're all very excited, and we've all had a ton of fun in designing it and doing a mock-up of it.

2K SPORTS



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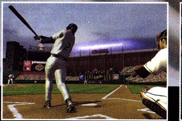

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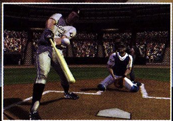

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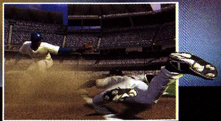

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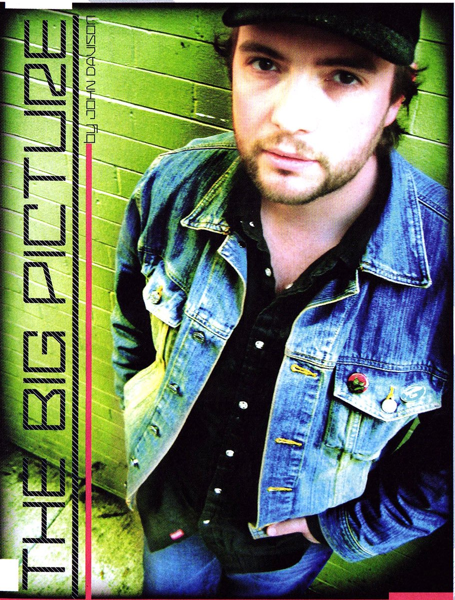
THE BIG PICTURE

by John Davison

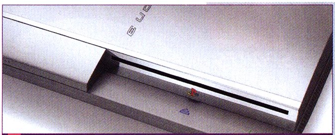


PS3 PREDICTIONS AND PUNDITUDE

Tom asked me to begin my first column by introducing myself to you all, and then provided the vague direction that he wanted "something interesting and/or funny." Some of you may have some vague recollection of my ugly, hairy mug from my previous incarnation as the ringleader around these parts. Before taking up my current position as Tom's boss, I was the editor-in-chief of this magazine for five years. Previously, I'd been steering *EGM*'s fortunes through the PS1 and Dreamcast years, and I hopped over to take the rudder on our *Official PlayStation* ship a few months before the PS2 was launched. Looking back, there are a lot parallels between what was going on back then and what we're seeing now in the run-up to PlayStation 3.

So, with part one of Tom's request taken care of, here's my crack at the second part: some predictions!

I should preclude this with some sort of disclaimer, I guess. What follows is simply unabashed punditry, and despite being presented with a certain amount of conviction, it's by no means fueled by any under-the-table note passing at some sort of executive level. In short, I'm *guessing*. They are educated guesses extrapolated from historical precedent and current information, but…yeah…I'm pretty much winging it here in an attempt to provoke some debate.



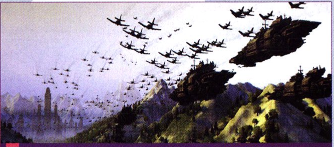
THE PS3 LAUNCH

I'm going to say November in the United States, and I'm going to say that it won't be a penny more than $399.99. Why? Because Sony really can't afford to be more than a year behind its main competition, and Microsoft has set a pricing precedent that only a crazy person would break. You can't turn up to the party late, demand more cash, and just keep your fingers crossed that everyone's dumb enough to tolerate that. The guts of the PS3 may well be made of magic beans and alien technology, but the Xbox 360 has set the price point.

SELECT
START
SONY

THE DUALSHOCK 3

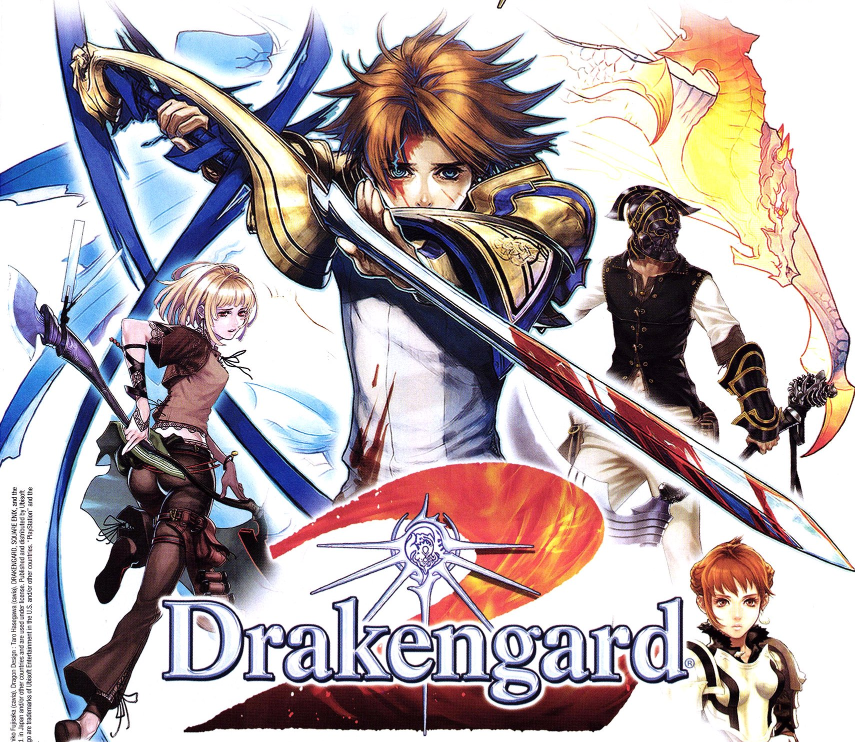
We've all looked at the prototype boomerang banana thing and probably wondered what the hell Kutaragi and his cronies have been smoking. This was more than likely a case of them sticking something different out there to see how much change we'd tolerate. Judging from reactions after E3 last year, "not much" seems to sum that up quite nicely. Consider this, though: The banana is as small and slender as young Scooter's well-manicured fingers, but it's also supposed to be wireless. If it's going to use Bluetooth, it's going to need juice, and for that it needs somewhere for the batteries to go—probably some kind of receptacle that can accommodate a couple of AAs. So unless Kutaragi has found a way to make it run on magical fairy dust, that prototype version isn't go to work unless it's connected with a cord. My guess? The DualShock 3 will look an awful lot like the DualShock 2 with an unsightly bulge on the back. In fact, it may look remarkably like Logitech's delightful wireless pad.

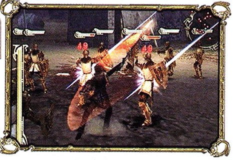


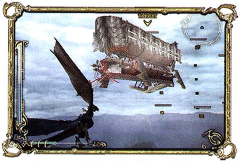
THE LINEUP

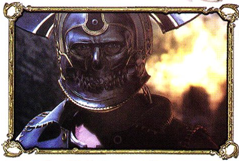
There probably won't be very many games on day one, and much like we saw at the PS2 launch (and, indeed, the 360 launch), very few will show the true potential of the system. Coupled with the inevitable hardware supply problems in November and December, this will fuel pretty much the exact same media coverage that we saw with the 360 over Thanksgiving last year. *Warhawk* may make the "launch window" and will hopefully be spectacular, but the real jaw-droppers on the system aren't going to be shown until E3 in 2007.

From the chaos of battle, four heroes rise




Switch between 4 characters with unique weapons and abilities.


Lay waste to entire armies on the ground and in the air.


Annihilate enemies with more than 60 weapons in over 90 missions.

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MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Violence

PlayStation®2

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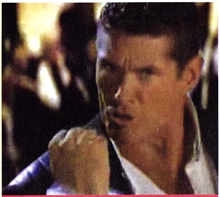
pause WHEN YOU'RE NOT PLAYING GAMES

I AM 8-BIT
ART INSPIRED BY CLASSIC VIDEOGAMES OF THE '80S
BY JON M. GIBSON FOREWORD BY CHUCK KLOSTERMAN

SEE

I AM 8-BIT
Jon M. Gibson

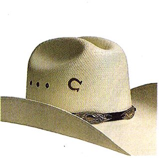
Videogames may not be art to some, but surely art inspired by videogames is still considered art. *I Am 8-Bit* is a collection of paintings, drawings, and other forms of artistry that focuses on various videogames, ranging from *Super Mario Bros.* and *Metroid* to *Mega Man* and *Dig Dug.* A lot of the art in here is pretty damn cool and may actually surprise you, particularly the image of Link from *The Legend of Zelda* standing with his mouth agape and a cigarette sticking out to one side.



"HOOKED ON A FEELING"
David Hasselhoff

Dachshunds, angels, motorcycles, the Hoff—words simply cannot describe how these elements come together in a sweet symphony of blue screen effects and complete crap. Seriously, Hasselhoff, what the hell were you thinking? Sure, we've all imagined what it would be like to fake-snowboard down a mountain, only to take a bite out of an enormous fake salmon. Or hey, how about looking like a complete jackass jumping next to footage of the Masai warriors from Africa? Do a search for "Hooked on a Feeling" at Youtube.com to check it out for yourself.

FEEL



COWBOY HATS
Cowboys

We're not recommending any specific brand of cowboy hat, but you should really go out and get one. Not only will it protect you from the sun's harmful rays while you're out wrangling some cattle or shopping for Dr. Pepper, but it will also make people think you're Walker, Texas Ranger. Really, you can't go wrong either way, unless you try to rope cattle while drinking Dr. Pepper, because that's just asking for all sorts of trouble.

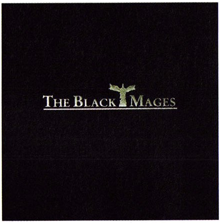
AMPULEX COMPRESSA
Carl Zimmer

Actually, this is the last thing you want to go out and feel. This wasp controls the movements of cockroaches, which it needs to lay its eggs, by jamming its stinger into the roach's brain and searching for the part that controls movement. Once found, the wasp "guides" the cockroach to go back to its lair, where it begins the whole egg-laying process. Nature is totally screwed up and scary, and these kinds of things freak us out!

LISTEN

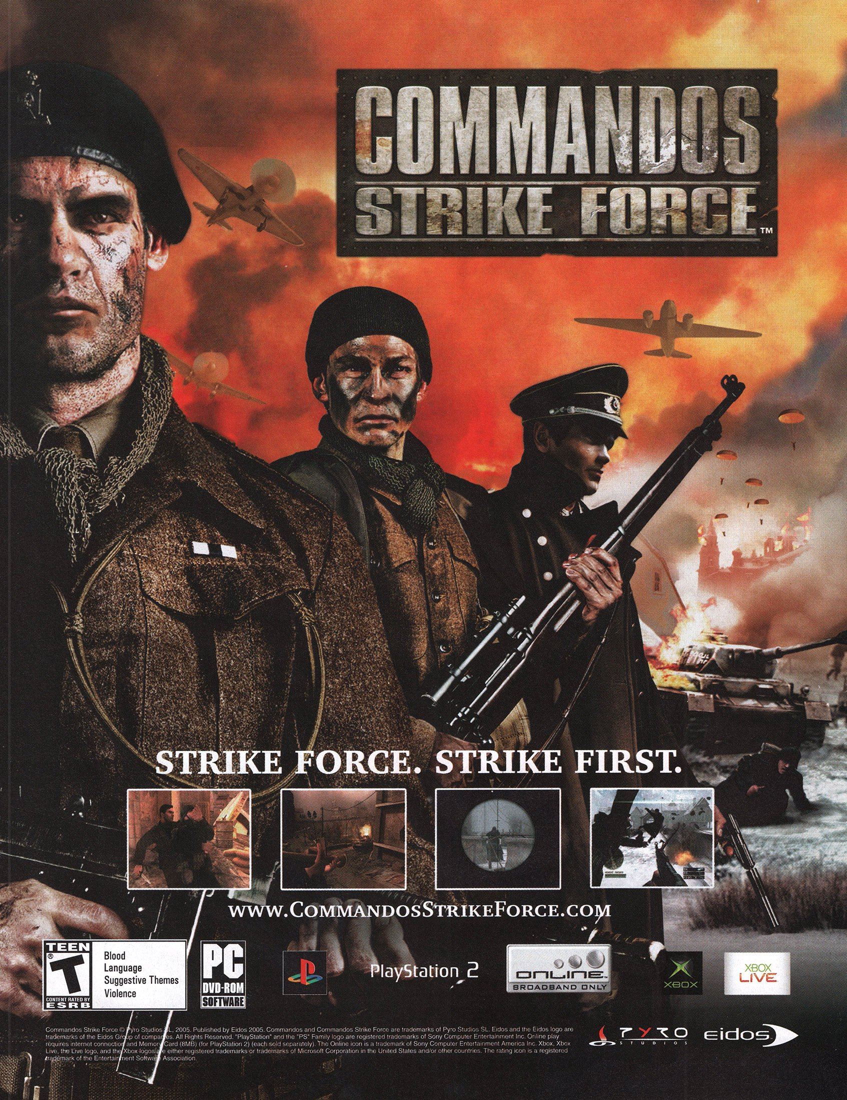
VON IVA
Von Iva

Imagine if all of the dudes in the Killers were actually not dudes, but women instead, and you'd have Von Iva! OK, so maybe that's not the most accurate description since the Killers are a bunch of sellouts. A better description would be this: Imagine badass girls who play 10 times better and 10 times harder than the Killers making some crazy electro-blues shenanigans with so much energy that your head will explode.



THE BLACK MAGES
The Black Mages

It's not that the Black Mages are new or amazingly good, but the fact that the Black Mages are headed by Nobuo Uematsu—the man behind the music for the *Final Fantasy* games—makes the band noteworthy if you've never had a chance to check them out. The Black Mages perform rock remixes of various *Final Fantasy* songs, which you can now download on iTunes along with all kinds of other *Final Fantasy* music, including orchestral versions of songs!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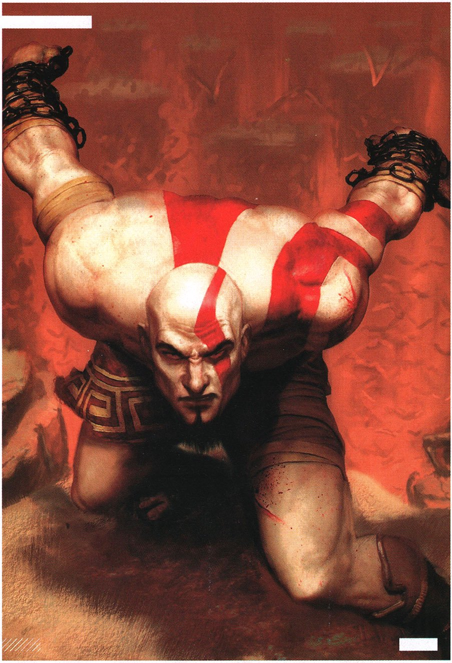
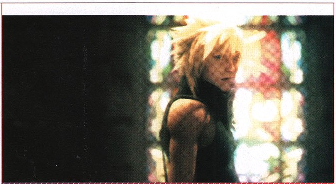


GOD OF WAR 2

ONE OF THE PS2'S MOST HIGHLY ACCLAIMED GAMES GETS A SEQUEL

Representatives from Sony CEA have indeed confirmed that a *God of War* sequel is on the way, which shouldn't surprise anyone who finished the original game. Many of the unlockable extras found in *God of War* hinted heavily at a sequel, to the point that it seemed as though a follow-up was right around the corner. Indeed, it seems some aspects of the original game that the developer axed (and also featured in the extras), such as the Icarus wings for Kratos, have a strong chance of showing up in the sequel—we're anxious to see how much of that content makes the transition.

While the sequel will still be developed at Sony's Santa Monica studio, David Jaffe, who was lead designer on the original *God of War*, isn't the one directly in charge, since he's currently busy working on *HL* for the PSP. Whether or not this will affect the overall direction, gameplay mechanics, or other aspects of the game remains to be seen, but either way, *God of War 2* has some very high expectations to live up to.



PLAYSTATION BITS

BYTE-SIZED NEWS

If you can't get enough of Hideo Kojima and his Kojima Productions studio (and we know you can't), then you'll be happy to know that Mr. ***Metal Gear*** has started an audio blog, or podcast if you will, in which he will more than likely discuss a variety of topics ranging from whatever he ate last night to the current state of gaming.... Elsewhere, the perpetual delay facing Square Enix's ***Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*** will end—in April. The holdup seems to stem from a variety of issues ranging from lackluster reviews to rampant Internet downloads and extras that haven't been finished.... On our side of the pond, Electronic Arts has reportedly laid off a sizable portion of its Redwood Shores studio, according to 1UP.com. This studio is currently working on ***The Godfather*** and other versions of ***From Russia With Love***, so maybe that's not such a bad thing.... Lastly, in the "here we go again" category, Rockstar is being sued for the umpteenth time. This time, it's coming from a Los Angeles attorney who claims the company withheld key information that would've prevented ***San Andreas'*** appearance in stores. Yeah, take a number.

Photo: Martin Adolfsson

WHAT'S IN YOUR PSP?

IT DOES MORE THAN PLAY GAMES

JENS MATTHIES

Art director at Starbreeze Studios, currently working on *The Darkness*

GAMES

I just recently bought the PSP and a copy of *GTA: Liberty City Stories*. I really want to play *The Sims 2*, but the reviews for the PSP version have been a big turnoff. I just want a good turn-based sci-fi RPG such as *Fallout* or *UFO: Enemy Unknown*. Seems like I'll have to wait.

MOVIES

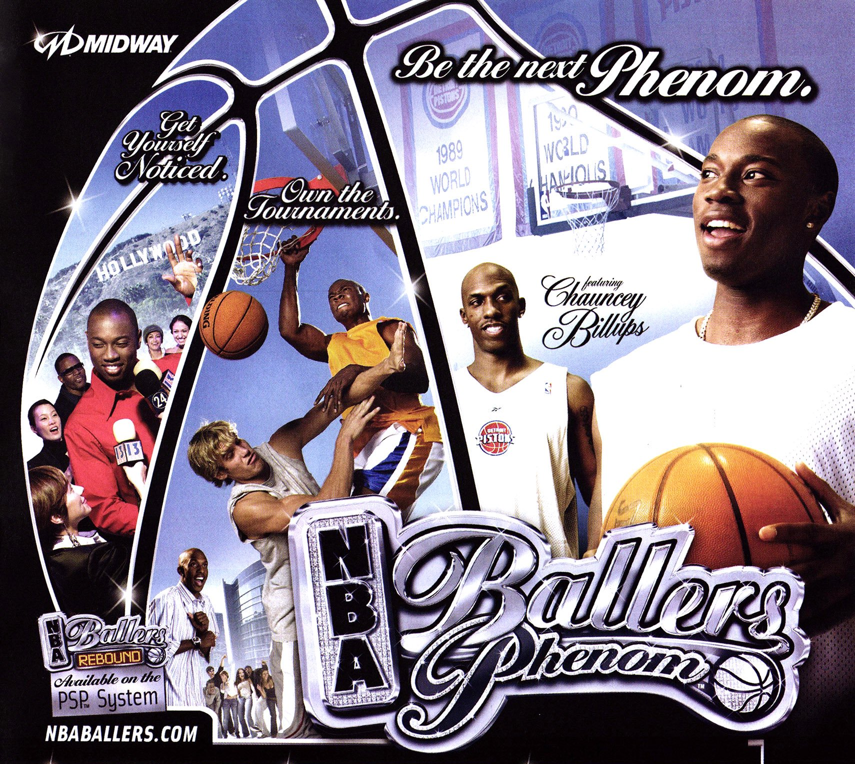
2005 was an unusually horrible year at the movies. The only film I'm looking forward to is *Brokeback Mountain*, which I'll acquire at first opportunity.

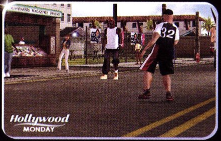
MUSIC

Gearing up for the new Tool release by listening to their previous albums. I think their upcoming record is going to be the greatest work of art humanity has ever mustered. Also listening to Tomahawk and Meshuggah.

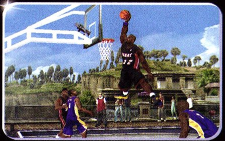
WEB

Currently researching the Panasonic AG-HVX200. It will rule the indie film-making world.

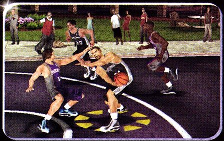




For the first time ever in an NBA game, step off the court to explore Los Angeles and choose your path to stardom as the #1 draft pick or entrepreneur.



The exciting NBA Ballers action is back with all new game modes, brand new luxury courts, and the most insane blacktop moves.



All-new 2 on 2 gameplay allows you to pick a partner from the best players in the NBA and pair up with a teammate to take it to the online courts.

NBA.COM

NBA

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PlayStation 2

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LIFE OF CRIME
Want to learn more about Sega's wild yakuza simulator? Be sure to check out the preview on page 68 for more details on what you can do in this *Grand Theft Auto*–inspired game with a Japanese flavor.

J-TOWN

GRAND THEFT AUTO: TOKYO

Recently, the tracking moguls at the NPD Group released data showing 2005 as the best year for videogames sales on record; the $10.5 billion in sales represented a 6 percent increase over 2004's numbers and the highest since the NPD started tracking this information. Things are looking up—in America, at least. But in Japan, the industry continues its slow decline. New iterations of popular franchises sell fewer and fewer copies, and the overall size of the industry has significantly shrunk from the PS1 glory days. Where did things go wrong?

Here's one theory: *Grand Theft Auto*. Each of the *GTA* games has sold more than 10 million copies worldwide—but only 250,000 of those copies in Japan. That's a reasonably good showing, but nowhere near blockbuster status. Missing out on *GTA* isn't necessarily the end of the world, but Japan missed out on the series' aftereffects, too. The countless clones, for starters. Some copied the free-roaming gameplay (*Mercenaries*, *The Simpsons: Hit & Run*), while others mindlessly aped the urban style (*50 Cent: Bulletproof*, *25 to Life*), but all attempted to deliver something different from what gamers got from the original blueprint. But it was the *GTA* entries' strong sales numbers, not their gameplay, that had the strongest aftershocks. The top-selling series of this generation is M-rated and extremely graphic? You'd better believe the moneymen noticed. The age of the average gamer had been increasing for a while, but *GTA3* marked a paradigm shift in the industry's perception of the market. Adult gamers were now the most powerful force around, and developers shifted the target demographics of their titles to match.

Except that none of this happened in Japan. *Grand Theft Auto* sold reasonably well, but it ended up only a midrange hit. The Japanese market blithely trundled on, continuing to focus on the same eternal demographic: the lucrative but limited *shonen* market, consisting of boys ages 8 to 14. Think about it: How many RPGs have you played with plucky teenage protagonists? More to the point, how many more do you *want* to play? It's a well-known fact of marketing that demographics only scale in one direction: Kids desperately want what the adults have, but adults leave childish things behind. And by not expanding its "acceptable" demographic range, the Japanese market is letting older gamers slip away.

However, some Japanese developers have finally started going after this "forgotten" older market. In fact, the Nintendo DS is trouncing Sony's PlayStation Portable not because of traditional Nintendo franchises but thanks to the million-selling *Brain Training* series and foreign-language learning dictionaries. And while these are not traditional "games," they still cater to a neglected market niche that needed addressing.

Sega, meanwhile, has published a small gem called *Ryu Ga Gotoku*, or "Like a Dragon." The game's genre defies description—essentially, it's a yakuza simulator. As the game begins, ex-yakuza protagonist Kazama Kiryu has just served 10 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit. The game follows his search for answers as he fights to understand how the world has changed during his absence. In sharp contrast to the explanation-heavy dialogue of most *shonen* games, *Ryu Ga Gotoku* features a script by a professional novelist, and the story feels like a Beat Takeshi–penned drama, not a "programmer plot" that merely strings together set pieces.

> THE JAPANESE MARKET BLITHELY CONTINUES TO FOCUS ON THE SAME ETERNAL DEMOGRAPHIC.

The game's presentation is also uniquely serious: The overworld is nothing but a few bustling blocks of a fictional red light district, meticulously modeled down to every faded sign and broken bike frame.

It's a dark, violent, and truly *mature* game. Fortunately, it's not only selling well, but selling consistently, and it's still in the top 20 after two months of release. Hopefully, its critical and sales success will encourage other developers to seek out the adult Japanese market.

i play. i win. i gloat. i kick back. i catch a movie.
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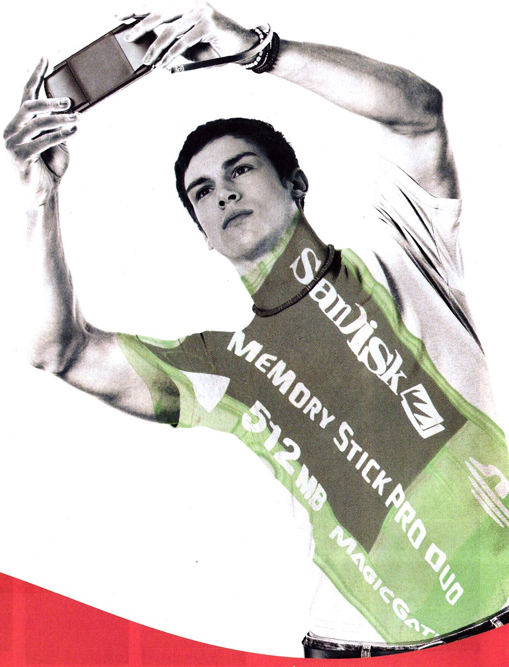

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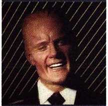
APRIL 06

THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

SUNDAY

02

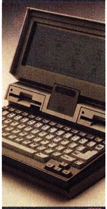
OPM's favorite master of cuisine, lovingly nicknamed "the Mario of Iron Chefs," turns 64. Happy birthday, **Hiroyuki Sakai**!



23

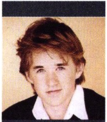
Remember when Max Headroom was the coolest thing ever? **New Coke** debuted 21 years ago today.

MONDAY



03

IBM's first **laptop** was released in 1986. What would you pay for a 13-pound 4.77MHz processor with 256KB of RAM? $2,000? Anybody?



10

That kid who could see dead people (and who is also the voice of *Kingdom Hearts*' Sora) turns 18 today.

TUESDAY

NEW GAMES

04

Your PSP can finally load up on the games with ***Metal Gear Acid 2*, *The Getaway***, and ***Mortal Kombat: Deception*** all available.

11

Will Lara let us down again? ***Tomb Raider: Legend*** shows up on store shelves today, so you can find out for yourself.

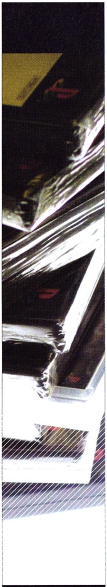
25

Aeris fans, rejoice: ***Final Fantasy: Advent Children*** should finally be available on UMD.

NEW GAMES

WEDNESDAY

NEW GAMES



Celebrate making it halfway through **Consumer Awareness Week** by treating yourself to some new games.

THURSDAY

06

Twinkies (one of gaming's great snacks) were invented in 1930. So far their shelf life is 76 years and counting.

13

Show some love to the god of war—it's **David Jaffe**'s birthday.

27

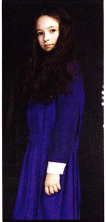
The **computer mouse**, which was introduced by Xerox, is a quarter of a century old.

FRIDAY

NEW FLICKS

14

In addition to saving the world on *24*, Kiefer Sutherland also appears in ***The Wild*** (opening today) and ***The Sentinel*** (opening next week). Show-off.



21

Could it be that the seeming impossibility of a good videogame-based movie has happened? We'll know today when ***Silent Hill*** comes out.

NEW FLICKS

SATURDAY

01

Insert April Fool's joke here about Sony handing out **PlayStation 3** consoles today.

15

Harry Potter's **Emma Watson** turns 16, which means she is old enough to drive but still not old enough for you to think of as hot.

29

Pull out the dance-pad and bust a move—it's **International Dance Day**.

DIDN'T WANT TO BE A FOLLOWER
AUG '04

BECAME A SOLDIER
FEB '05

SSG VICTOR HENDRICKS,
SQUAD LEADER 31B, MILITARY POLICE

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THE

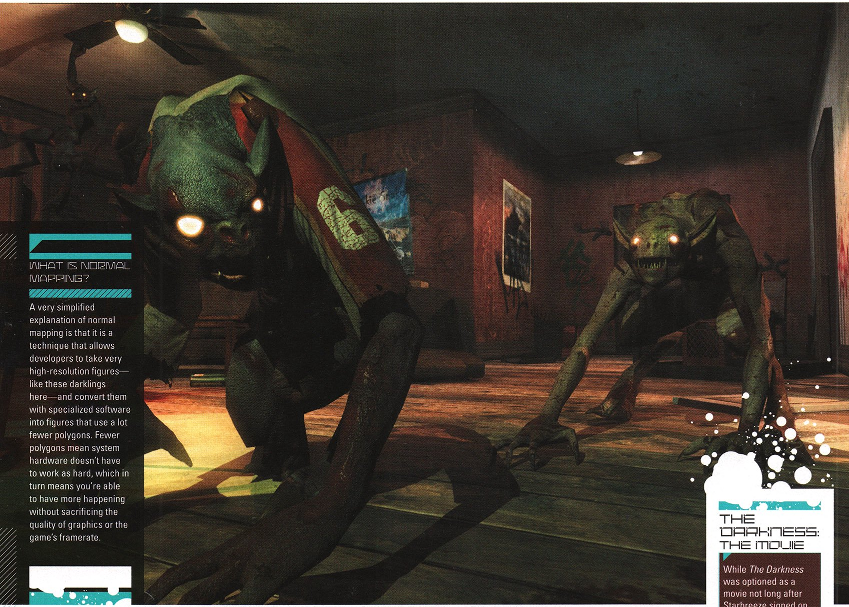
THE DARKNESS:

AND HOW IT WILL LIGHT THE WAY ON THE PLAYSTATION 3

BY DANA JONGEWAARD photos by MARTIN ADOLFSSON

Jackie Estacado is in a bit of a bind. For one thing, his Mafia boss uncle wants him dead. And then there's that little matter of being possessed by an unknown evil. And he's not quite sure what to make of these demon heads sprouting out of his shoulders, either.

But the news isn't all bad. When you look as pretty as the screenshot on these pages does, it makes you feel all warm and fuzzy inside. And it's not every day that a videogame character gets his premiere on the PlayStation 3.



WHAT IS NORMAL MAPPING?

A very simplified explanation of normal mapping is that it is a technique that allows developers to take very high-resolution figures—like these darklings here—and convert them with specialized software into figures that use a lot fewer polygons. Fewer polygons mean system hardware doesn't have to work as hard, which in turn means you're able to have more happening without sacrificing the quality of graphics or the game's framerate.

THE DARKNESS: THE MOVIE

While *The Darkness* was optioned as a movie not long after Starbreeze signed on to do the game, the two projects are not related aside from their common source material, the Top Cow comic. Brothers Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang, who have made films such as *The Eye* and *Bangkok Dangerous*, are signed on to direct the movie.

GAME TECH: THE NEXT GENERATION

It's not much to look at: just a big, perforated silver box with some outputs in a black panel. If you saw it next to some outdated stereo equipment on a shelf at Goodwill, you wouldn't give it a second glance.

"That's our fourth version," says engine programmer Jim Tjellen, nodding to the PS3 development kit on the table. "It showed up on Wednesday."

Jens Andersson, lead designer for *The Darkness*, picks up the PS2 DualShock that's plugged into the dev kit and starts maneuvering around the onscreen alleyway. The next generation may not take us to completely realistic graphics, but if you let your eyes go slightly out of focus, you'd never know it when looking at this game. Andersson plays with the light source, dragging it around to demonstrate how the shadows shift in real time. The future is looking really freaking awesome.

Starbreeze Studios, located 30 minutes north of Stockholm in the university town of Uppsala, Sweden, wasn't much more than a blip on the radar in North America until 2004, when the company released *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* to critical acclaim. Of particular note was that every single review mentioned how impressive the graphics were. What made *Riddick* look so awesome was the game engine that Starbreeze built in-house, which is one of the first to make use of normal mapping (for an explanation, see above sidebar). In fact, the engine demonstrated normal mapping so impressively that it was the subject of its own article in *The New York Times*.

After *Riddick,* Starbreeze began looking for a new project to work on; eventually their search led them to *The Darkness*, a comic from publisher Top Cow. The story follows Jackie Estacado, an orphan adopted by a mob boss, his uncle Paulie. On Jackie's 21st birthday, he becomes possessed by an entity called the Darkness, which grants him enormous powers that he's not quite sure what to do with. And then he and his uncle have a falling-out, setting the stage for the game's events.

> "THE ENGINE WE USED ON RIDDICK WASN'T SUITED FOR THE CURRENT GENERATION OF HARDWARE."

We're now in a room looking at some of the characters that will populate the game world; right now a hulking monster with a huge fanged mouth and giant arms that reach to the ground is twirling around in a New York City subway station.

"[The engine we used on *Riddick*] wasn't really suited for the current generation of hardware," says Andersson. "This is *our* next generation—our second title with that sort of technology, which gives us a big advantage. With *The Darkness* we started with tools that were already developed for the core part of the technology."

Next up are some human models, including a cop, a punk-looking girl, and a meaty dude wearing a bloody apron. "Since the game takes place in New York, we really have to find a lot of different ways to

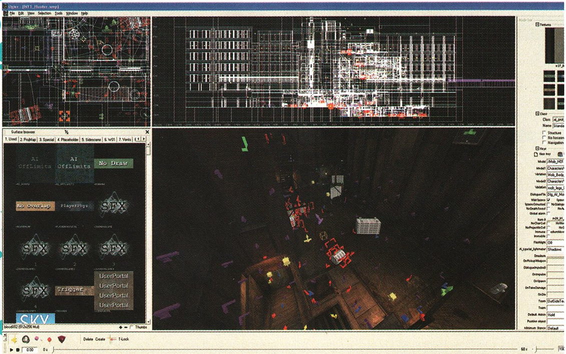
THE DARKNESS

PICTURE PAGE

This is a wall of concept art posted in one of the offices. One of its functions is, of course, to provide inspiration and guidance to the team as they're working, but this art will live on within the game as well. Some of it will be included as unlockable extras (think the cigarette packs that you collected in *Riddick*); other pieces may be repurposed as art in the game, such as film posters and billboards.

PRESENTING STARBREEZE

Four of the main players from *The Darkness* team, from left: Jens Andersson, lead designer; Lars Johansson, producer; Johan Kristiansson, CEO; Jens Matthies, art director.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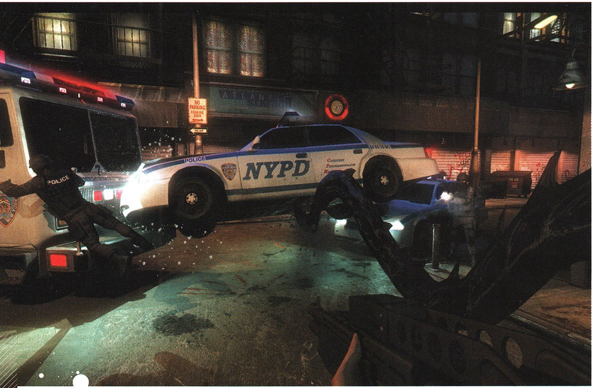
KEEP IT LEVEL

This is a shot from the level editor that the programmers work with. It's really crucial that everyone involved with the game knows the levels by heart. Matthies explains, "If a guy says, 'You go by the side door,' he makes a gesture to it. That means you have to know what the level looks like, where the guy is standing in relation to where he's pointing. If you're on the ball, you can infuse the acting with these details, which helps believability and navigation of gameplay."



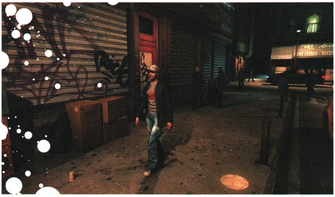
THE SETTING

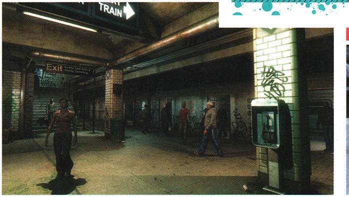
One of the things Starbreeze was most excited about was getting to use New York as a setting for a game—the city's grittiness was a great match for the aesthetic the studio likes to work in. But getting the feel of the city had its challenges.

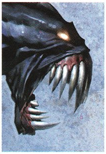
"We did a lot of research there, as far as trying to get the right feel of the city," says art director Jens Matthies. "There are so many details. The way a garbage bin looks in New York is different than the way a garbage bin looks in Los Angeles or in Sweden, so there's a lot of documentation. We were running around and photographing everything really carefully."

Lead designer Jens Andersson adds, "And that was trickier with the city's security regulations."

Matthies laughs: "We have police officers in the game, but we couldn't take direct pictures of them. I have a lot of candid pictures of cops, where I had the camera down by my waist and I would look the opposite way before taking the picture. So there're a lot of photos in which the heads are cut off and they're all blurry."







populate it," says Andersson. "And as with every next-generation title, content production is key. It takes longer to create each individual part of the contents since it's so much more detailed." He zooms in close on a man with a 5 o'clock shadow, and we can actually see his pores and the hairs sprouting out of the follicles.

INTO THE DARKNESS

Andersson tells us, "This game is about Jackie taking back control, both over his life, since he is possessed by this entity, and over his family, since his uncle is trying to get him killed." Right now, we're looking at a level set in a gritty alleyway in New York City. Jackie has to shut down a drug nest that his uncle Paulie has set up here.

Most of the game is set in first person, although some events (such as when Jackie is climbing a ladder) will cut to show him in third person (much like in *Riddick*). The team wants you to feel in control of Jackie throughout the whole game, which is why they are planning not to have cut-scenes breaking up the action—in fact, there is only one planned for the entire game, and that is at the very end.

I'm told to disregard Jackie, as his character is still placeholder art. At the end of the alley is a jumpy homeless-looking guy, from whom Jackie needs to get a password in order to get into the drug den. Andersson says, "In *Riddick* we learned how much the movement of characters and the specific voice acting gave them personality."

As soon as Jackie approaches the man standing in the alley, he starts making small talk. "That coat sure looks warm," the guy says as Jackie walks up.

"Part of making characters believable is having nice-looking animations, but another part of it is in behavior," explains Andersson. "We have really tried to make dialogue be interactive. In *The Darkness,* you can move around while you're in dialogue and walk away from him, and he should respond [to that slight]."

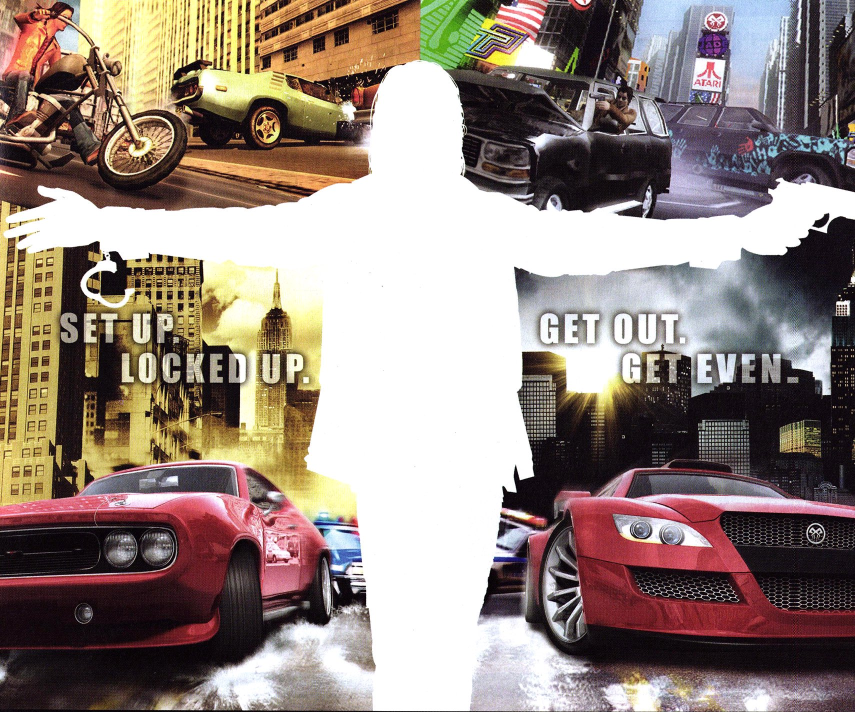
Producer Lars Johansson demonstrates this by making Jackie walk away. The man in the alley yells after us, "Hey, it only takes a second to be polite, you little prick!" Johansson then steers Jackie back down the alley and starts a conversation.

> HE ZOOMS IN CLOSE ON A MAN WITH A 5 O'CLOCK SHADOW AND WE CAN ACTUALLY SEE HIS PORES.

While the game is built around a very structured set of events, Starbreeze has tried to build a lot of freedom into that framework. For example, Jackie needs to break into the drug den in order to progress the story forward. But there are a lot of different ways he can get into the den. He can have a conversation with the guy in the alley and get him to give up the password willingly. Or Jackie can pull a gun on him and extract the password by force. Or, if the player chooses, Jackie can

DEVILS ON YOUR SHOULDER

The twin demon heads that you see on screen when employing Jackie's Darkness powers have been internally nicknamed Huginn and Muninn by the development team. In Nordic mythology, Huginn (which means "thought") and Muninn (which means "memory") are the two ravens that sit on the shoulders of übergod Odin.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LET THERE BE LIFE

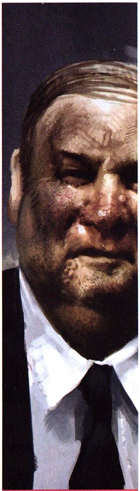
THE NEXT STEP TOWARD REALISM IN GAMES

"One of our strong visions in this game is to really have believable characters," says lead designer Jens Andersson. "A lot of this is done by voice and animation, but the biggest thing is something that we call vo-cap, which is basically simultaneous recording of voice and full-motion capture, including facial capture. And to my knowledge, it hasn't been done in a game yet."

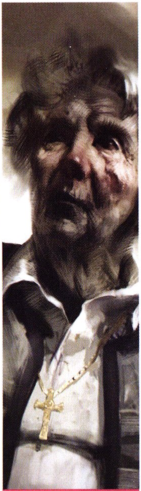
Art director Jens Matthies chimes in, "Yeah. I don't think anyone else is stupid enough to do it."

Starbreeze conducted five weeks of vo-cap sessions, recording more than 500 lines—with both voice and motion capture—per day. So it faced not only the challenges of grueling recording sessions, but also those related to staffing. Matthies explains, "You can't double up in the same way that you can normally. Instead of hiring a really talented voice actor who could do seven or eight roles, we tended to lean toward one actor doing one role. So you get the variation, and you tend to feel that every character is very unique."

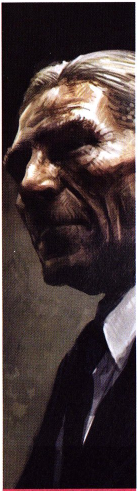
All in all, though, it worked out incredibly well for the game. "We had an extreme amount of freedom to cast," says Matthies, "so we picked the actors that we really felt were the best for the parts. Not necessarily actors that would help sell the game, but [ones] that are truly excellent."



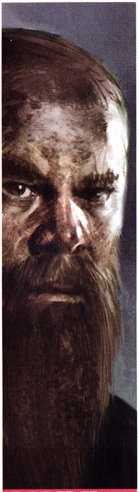
UNCLE PAULIE



AUNT SARAH



EDWARD SHROTE



THE BUTCHER

just kill the man on the spot—but that means he'll have to figure out an alternate way into the den.

"We try to encourage exploring and adventure," explains Andersson. "If a player wants to go through the game shooting things, he can do that. But players who want more of the story can take the time to talk with characters and explore."

POWER PLAY

As fans of the comic know, Jackie's Darkness powers are a key part of who he is, and those powers will be a key part of the game as well. Art director Jens Matthies says, "The game isn't *only* about shooting things, so we're keeping the weapons few but fairly refined. We wanted to encourage the use of Darkness powers." Darkness powers can be used only in the dark, but Jackie will often be able to manipulate the game's lighting by breaking bulbs and turning off switches.

In first-person games, players are used to having the physical manifestation of their weapon in front of them, which is why the team wanted a representation of Jackie's powers: hence the demon heads. When in Darkness mode, you'll see the demon heads on the bottom right and left sides of the screen. The demon heads have powers, but they also have personality. They look around on their own when at rest, and they might occasionally pick a little fight with each other. But don't be fooled by the playfulness: "These are basically the primal kill beasts," Matthies says.

Players will unlock Darkness powers throughout the game, and the process for doing this is by devouring. Devouring is exactly what it sounds like—once you've killed someone, the two demon heads swoop in on the body, and by the time they've finished, there's a nice puddle of blood on the ground. Devouring lets Jackie extract powers from people, and evil people give more bang for the buck.

Andersson tells us, "We don't want the Darkness powers to compete with the weapons—guns are pretty efficient tools of destruction already—so we really want to complement the guns." One of the powers is called creeping dark. (Check out what the power looks like in the story's opening screenshot on pages 44-45.) Creeping dark is primarily a scouting power—Jackie sends out a tentacle that can snake into places he can't go. Johansson shows it off by using it to sneak through a vent above a door in the alleyway and look around inside.

Another power is the demon arm, which is a long appendage that Jackie can use to grab, lash out, and even impale. The team's intention is for it to be a very destructive power, which Johansson demonstrates by reaching out and driving it straight through the alley guy's heart. He

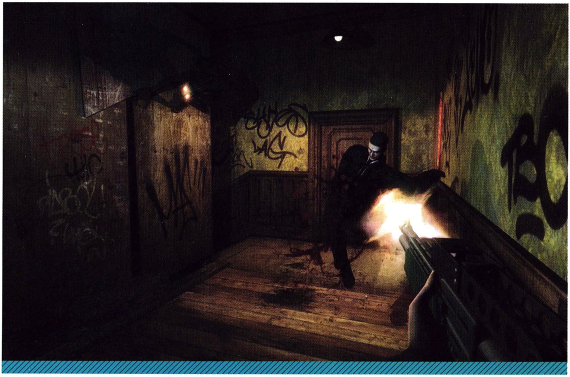
> "THE DEMON HEADS ARE BASICALLY THE PRIMAL KILL BEASTS."

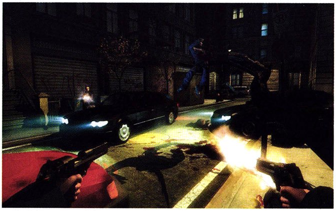
I WANT MY MTV!

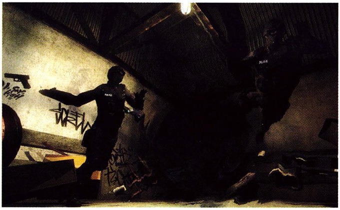
At one point in the level, we pass by a television, which Jackie flips on. One of the cool side features that Starbreeze wants to work into the game is fully functional television, complete with actual programming. "There are movies, TV shows, even commercials in the public domain," says Matthies. "So you can, in theory, emulate real TV, with channels."

FIGHT CLUB

Jackie will always have his own personal guns handy (two handguns that were handcrafted by darklings centuries ago), but he'll be able to pick up other guns that people drop and use them as well, as shown in the screen on the right. And of course, he has those awesomely crazy Darkness powers to use as well—below left, you can see how the demon arm can punch through people, and below right, witness the suction power that the black hole exerts.







screams and falls to the ground in a puddle of gore. ("Blood is prettier in the next generation," Andersson smiles.)

The last power we get to see is the black hole. After entering the drug den courtesy of the password we extracted from the alley guy, Jackie opens fire on the men in the room. He makes quick work of most of them, but one guy is hiding and we can't find him. So Jackie uses the black hole, which is a portal that starts sucking the contents of the room—chairs, tables, sofas, anything the last enemy might be hiding behind—into a void. The enemy is quickly exposed and then neatly dispatched.

When you're using the powers, you'll hear the voice of the Darkness itself occasionally talking in your ear. It's eerie, and it gives you the sense that just because Jackie has the ability to use these powers doesn't mean that it's necessarily a good thing for him to be doing it. But at least the Darkness also provides him with a few friends to keep him company.

SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIENDS

In the comic, Jackie is often accompanied by small, gremlinlike creatures that are basically henchmen of the Darkness. These creatures are known as darklings, and they're assistants that Jackie will be able to call on for help.

Darklings originate from people, and each has his own personality, one that somewhat reflects his former human persona. For example, a darkling who was an uptight, suit-wearing guy before death still carries some of those qualities with him, albeit in a darker, more perverse form.

The first darkling the team shows has a saw strapped to his back. Players can direct darklings to do Jackie's bidding, but they can also opt to let the darklings do what they want. They'll goof around and entertain themselves, but they'll also attack anyone who is threatening Jackie without being told to. In this case, we watch as the darkling kills an enemy and then happily makes short work of the body, courtesy of his saw.

You'll unlock new darklings throughout the game. The processes for this and for summoning them are still being worked out, but it's obvious that the team has been having fun endowing these creatures with a twisted sense of humor. As we watch, the darklings onscreen keep hopping around and making little comments to Jackie about what's going on. And each comes equipped with his own (usually lethal) accessory: One carries a sledgehammer, another swings a baseball bat, and a third wields a golf club.

Using the darklings is almost like solving a puzzle. You'll need to figure out the right type of darkling to use at the right time. One category of darkling is known as an activator, useful if Jackie needs to flip switches that are out of his reach. Another carries an eight ball with him that he likes to smash against things to turn them on or off—he's almost like a remote activator. And another, the electrifier, fulfills a similar function, but he uses electrical impulses to do it instead.

THE CAST

JACKIE ESTACADO, the game's main character, is being voiced by Kirk Acevedo, best known for his role as Miguel Alvarez on HBO prison drama *Oz.*

THE DARKNESS is voiced by Mike Patton, formerly the lead singer for Faith No More; more recently, he has collaborated with artists such as Bjork and John Zorn.

THE DARKLINGS are voiced by Richard Steven Horvitz, who also voices the title character in *Invader Zim.* He has done other videogame work, most recently the voice of Raz from *Psychonauts.*

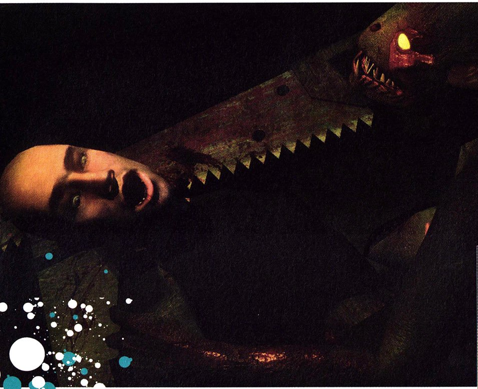
JENNY, Jackie's best friend from the orphanage, is voiced by Lauren Ambrose, who recently wrapped up her run as Claire Fisher on the HBO show *Six Feet Under.*

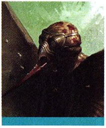
PAULIE, Jackie's adoptive father and the head of the Mafia, is voiced by Dwight Schultz, a videogame veteran whose other credits include *Gun*, *X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse*, *Killer 7*, *Destroy All Humans!*, and *Psychonauts.*

AUNT SARAH, the unofficial head of the Mafia, is voiced by Norma Michaels, who most recently appeared in *Wedding Crashers.*

THE BUTCHER, the guy who helps Jackie, um, clean up after some of his jobs, is voiced by Mike Starr, who has done work in films such as *Goodfellas* and recently voiced Lou in the game *Fight Club.*

CAPT. EDWARD SHROTE, the corrupt chief of police, is voiced by James Mathers, who has had guest roles in TV shows such as *JAG* and *Cold Case.*





OTHERWORLDLY EVIL

The majority of the game takes place in New York City, but Jackie eventually has to face the Darkness where it resides. That place is a nameless, fantastical world that is home to a never-ending battle—modeled after World War I—and populated by soldiers condemned to fight for eternity. Matthies explains: "The idea was that you would have these soldiers that basically can't die, so they're forced to relive this battle over and over again, but their bodies will take damage from it. So they'll have been crushed and burned and shot so many times that their faces will have been destroyed and healed and destroyed and healed. And eventually it's just this healed-up mush." Above is one of the soldiers, whose gas mask has morphed to become part of his face.

DARK HUMOR

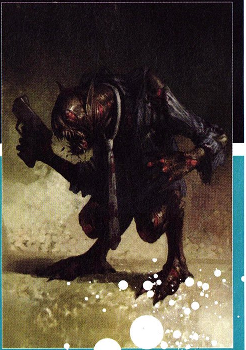
BRING ON THE COMIC RELIEF

While the number of darklings in the game is still being worked out, the team had a lot of fun getting creative with them. For example, here is the ceiling ninja, who you can put in the ceiling; he'll hide there until an enemy walks underneath, at which point he can reach through and chop him with a ninja move. Another is the kamikaze bomber, who is so heavy from the weight of the explosives he carries that he can't go up walls. He can, however, run forward into an enemy, kind of like a living hand grenade.

One of the team's favorites is an old grumpy darkling, who, in the words of art director Jens Matthies, "is practically useless. This guy is a really, really old darkling who's been doing this for thousands of years and has gotten really bored with it. So you'll say, 'Go attack this thing,' and he'll say, 'F*** you!' and then go do it but under protest, not really putting any effort into it."

Lead designer Jens Andersson interjects, "But he's a cop hater."

Matthies smiles, "Oh yeah, if he sees them, he'll go into these superninja moves."



Darklings can also be used to fetch things. Jackie can't climb up walls, but darklings can, so he can use them to grab things that are too high up or even have them help out with grabbing collectibles throughout the game.

The darkling with the sledgehammer at his side goes crazy on another victim. After the man is left in a bloody pulp on the floor, the darkling leans over him. "My regards to your family," he cackles. The voice sounds kind of like the caterwauling of an alley cat.

Matthies smiles fondly. "They're funny, but they're evil funny."

RAISING THE BAR

"Starbreeze is a technology-driven company," says Andersson, "so being out early in the platform cycle is what we strive for." The studio has been working on *The Darkness* since the summer of 2004, long before next-generation development kits were anything more than a concept. But their prior experience has already put them one step ahead of the competition. Andersson tells us, "In *Riddick*, the technology was focused on researching this new engine, but [in this game] we're focused on making everything work on the next-generation hardware." While the team size is about 25 percent larger than *Riddick*'s, he says that the additional staff is primarily to help produce the game's increased content rather than work on technical issues.

So what's been their experience on the PS3 so far? "It's complex hardware," says Andersson. "If you want to take advantage of it, you've got to rethink how a lot of stuff works. But for every revision Sony sends, the tools and technology are more mature. And when we develop technology internally here at Starbreeze, we tie it really closely to game design. That's the advantage of an in-house engine—we know what kind of game we're going to do, what types of technologies to create to make the game benefit."

Andersson says the game will definitely have an online component, but until they know more about the network structure, they can't say for sure what it will include. "We still don't know much about Sony's online plans," he says. "I think they have big hopes, and we know there's something coming, but we don't know to what extent that will be. We'll need to rethink the size of online whenever we get that info."

> "WE'RE FOCUSED ON MAKING EVERYTHING WORK ON THE NEXT-GENERATION HARDWARE."

What does the future hold for Starbreeze? "Technologywise—where we'll end up in five years, I can't say," Andersson says. "There are some limitations in the next-gen hardware on the graphics sides. But we are really striving for realism. I don't think we'll ever stray from that path."

He pauses, then adds, "For me, that's what next generation is about—making everything that's onscreen as believable as possible."

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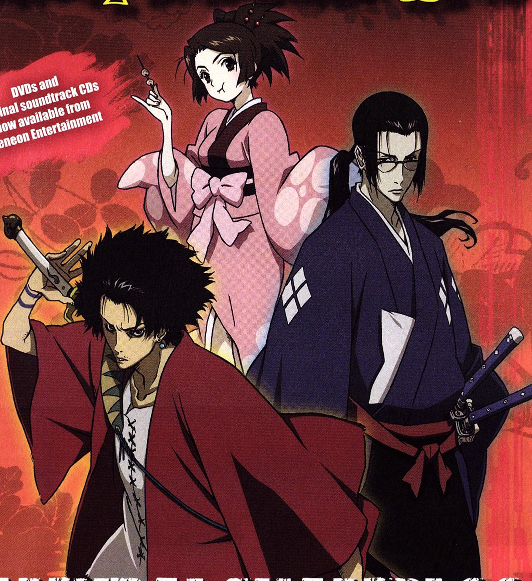

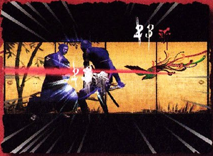

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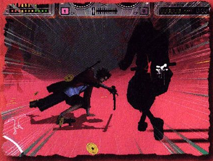

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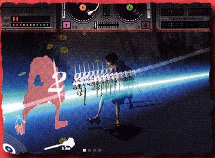

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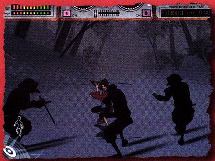

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TEEN
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Blood
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

BANDAI NAMCO Games

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PlayStation®2

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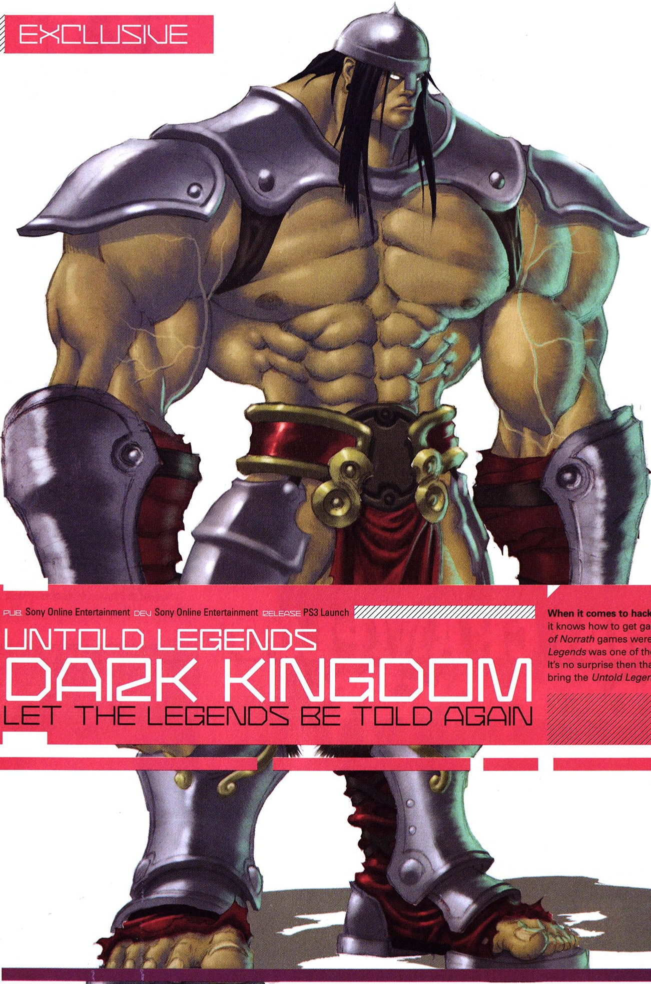
EXCLUSIVE



UN-CHAMPIONED
When we asked why SOE chose to bring *Untold Legends* to PS3 rather than *Champions of Norrath*, Senior Brand Manager Chris Sturr told us, "*Untold Legends* was wildly successful on the PSP as a launch title, so we wanted to capitalize on that as a launch title for the PS3. The *UL* engine and property were done here internally by SOE—*Champions of Norrath* was done outside by Snowblind. We wanted to leverage our expertise and our engine and technology here for PS3."

PUB. Sony Online Entertainment DEV. Sony Online Entertainment RELEASE PS3 Launch

UNTOLD LEGENDS DARK KINGDOM

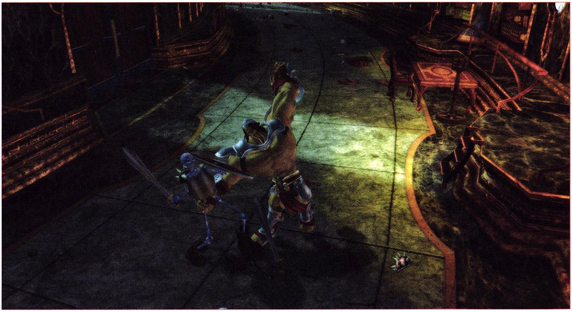
LET THE LEGENDS BE TOLD AGAIN

When it comes to hack-n-slash, Sony Online has shown it knows how to get gamers on board. Its *Champions of Norrath* games were big sellers on PS2, and *Untold Legends* was one of the best-selling PSP launch titles. It's no surprise then that Sony Online has chosen to bring the *Untold Legends* series to the next generation.

GOOD AND EVIL

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Every dungeon crawler needs a tale of extreme woe that befalls an innocent region and which can only be removed by a lone, brave warrior. (For more info on the story details, turn to page 56; to avoid spoilers, skip to the interview with *Dark Kingdom*'s producer, Andy Sites, on page 58.) Surprisingly, the plot is not contiguous with the previous games in the series (hence, it's not being titled *Untold Legends 3*); rather, the team is using the same basic setting but allowing themselves to skip around within the overall time line of *Untold Legends* lore. Sites promises, "Our story line is going to be a lot more immersive than people typically associate with action-RPGs."



CAVEMAN

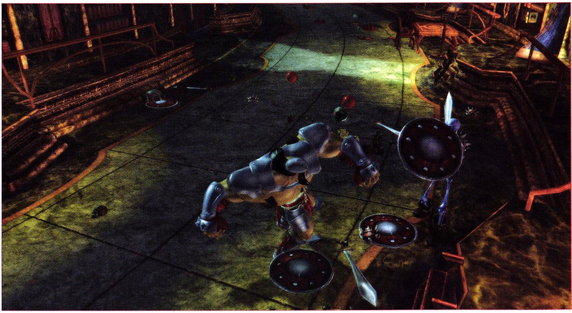
THESE ARE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

At present, the team plans to let people choose from three playable characters (and it might add more). The brute (pictured in screens here) is, as you would expect, one who has the distinct tendency to depend on his fists when dealing with baddies. Others are the mage, who will rely on his magic attacks, and the knight, who will probably be an in-betweener who fuses the brute's fisticuffs with the mage's enormous brain. Everyone knows that skeletons are a staple of any hero's combat diet, but the team is hiring designers to create a slew of other enemies for the heroes to battle against.

HIGH-TECH HORROR

BETTER DYING THROUGH SCIENCE

While development has a way to go, the team is excited about using the multiple Cell processors to add a level of detail that prior titles haven't been able to provide. When you smash those ubiquitous skeletons, you'll be able to watch their bones ricochet individually off the stone walls (let's call that "tibia bounce mapping"), and enemies that sport flesh over their frames will slump realistically thanks to rag-doll physics. And some of that Cell might will be used to power fancy-shmancy effects, such as white-hot lightning or glistening great balls of fire, which you'll be able to hurl with the greatest of ease. All of it, of course, will be displayed in glorious 1080p.



SPOILER ALERT!
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SPOILER ALERT!

TELLING THE LEGEND

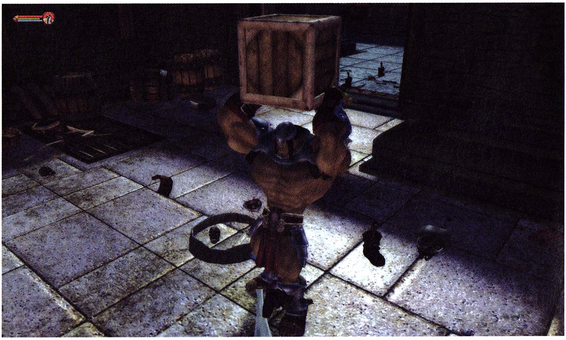
EXCLUSIVE STORY DETAILS—ONLY HERE!

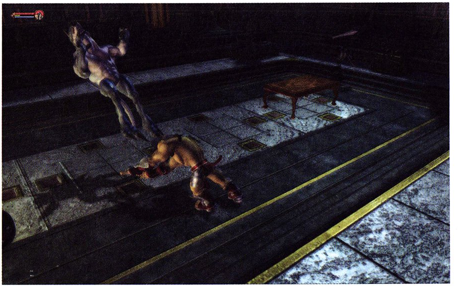
IF YOU LIKE YOUR PLOTS FRESH AND UNSPOILED, PLEASE STOP READING. BUT IF YOU LIKE A GOOD MORALISTIC FANTASY TALE, READ ON.

King Halaskar, the ruler of Dureth, has been your boss for a while now; while he's been a good guy in the past, you and your buddies from the Dragon's Shade (think a black-ops team, but with knives and olde-time words instead of guns) are starting to think that maybe he's going over to the dark side. He suspects this and packs you off to fight in distant lands.

When you come back, your worst suspicions are confirmed—the king has been torturing and killing innocents. Yikes. The only solution is to take him out (this is a certified technique for climbing the corporate ladder, by the way), but Halaskar, suspecting the plot, foils your plan. You manage to escape in your airship, only to crash-land a short while later. Fortunately, your Dragon's Shade buddies have an underground hideout that you can escape to. There you find out that Halaskar is getting advice from an ancient spirit called the Tower Elder (no relation to the Tower Younger), who lives in a, well, tower in the kingdom. You fight your way to see this spirit, who tells you that the king is getting his powers from another dimension in the universe that thrives on the pain of others.

By traveling to other parts of the kingdom and liberating people from the torture of places such as the Sunken Cathedral, the Cliffs of the Fallen, the Kiln, and the Grinder, you are able to debilitate Halaskar's power. However, in your battle against the Princess of Anguish (who is no longer on speaking terms with her cousin, the Duchess of Solace and Maths), you become corrupted by her sheer evil. Nevertheless, you hang on to your goodness long enough to find King Halaskar and finish him off. But then you realize that the whole thing may have been an elaborate setup....





STORYTELLING WIZARDRY

For the plot of the third entry in the *Untold Legends* series, SOE hired author Keith Baker, a former game developer who left the industry to concentrate on his writing. He has penned *Dungeons & Dragons* novels and sourcebooks for publisher Wizards of the Coast.

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WITH DANIEL NEGREANU

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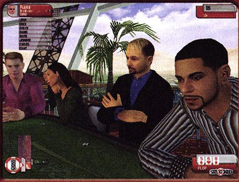

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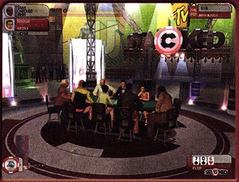

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- Maxim magazine

"Genius."

- Xbox.com

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Crude Humor
Mild Language
Simulated Gambling

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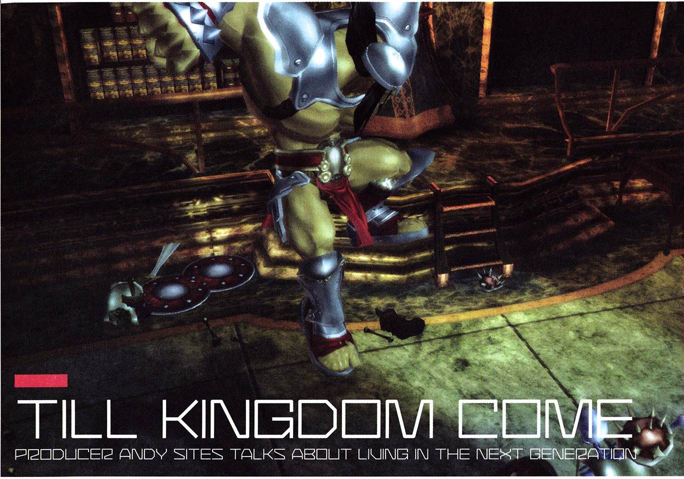
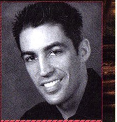


TILL KINGDOM COME

PRODUCER ANDY SITES TALKS ABOUT LIVING IN THE NEXT GENERATION



RÉSUMÉ

Associate Producer
EverQuest
1999
Producer
EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark
2000
Producer
EverQuest II
2004
Producer
EverQuest II: Desert of Flames
2005

OPM You're working with a team with a variety of development experience—*EverQuest*, *EverQuest II*, *Untold Legends*. Is the PS3 difficult to develop for—any more so than the other platforms you've worked with?

ANDY SITES No, I wouldn't say it's necessarily more difficult. It definitely provides new challenges for us. Physically, with most PC and past-generation console development, it's all had a similar hardware and programming structure. And the PS3 is the first time we've had to make a programming and art mind shift that requires treading on new ground. For example, the cel-shader system is something that technically was capable on very, very high-end multiprocessor PCs but never has been available or financially feasible to regular retail gamers. This is the first time we've really been capable of running multiple threads off of multiple processors, which in turn means better visuals onscreen, better game mechanics, and so on.

From an engine standpoint, we're capable, finally, on consoles, of using rendering engines that are more shader based. Typically, in the past, it was model your creature, then texture it, then animate it, and you're done. Now it's many more steps—you also create the bump map and you create the specular map and you create all the additional layers that not only make it look better, but make it much more lifelike.

OPM Does this mean you have to work with a larger team than in past games?

AS Yeah—I'd say that's really been the biggest change. The budget and the team size have been required to increase quite a bit on the art side and the code side as well.

OPM How do you develop for hardware that, in some respects, isn't even finalized yet? Do you just plan and hope for the best?

AS That's the beauty of working with an experienced team. You use your best estimate of where things are going to be six months from now, 12 months from now. You just draw that line in the sand and hope that you're right.

OPM You're working with a team that has a lot more experience in online than the average console team has. Can we take this to be an indicator of online plans?

AS Um...yes it is, but I can't discuss specifics. We're not making an MMO, but we're definitely leveraging our online programming and design resources.

OPM Do you think developers have an increased responsibility to continue pushing the boundaries of gaming as we move into the next generation?

AS Absolutely. I think a lot of that isn't just their personal desire to do so—I think the consumers are going to require that. There are going to be two types of games. There will be the games that have the experience and talent and budget, like companies like SOE have, where we can put all of that into the development of a single game. And it's going to make it more difficult for the smaller companies to deliver a title that can compete with us.

> "THE PS3 IS THE FIRST TIME WE'VE HAD TO MAKE A PROGRAMMING AND ART MIND SHIFT."

OPM What do you think is the paramount thing for teams to keep in mind while developing for the PS3?

AS I would say that it's keeping up with the latest high-end rendering techniques. Gameplay is gameplay—if you actually go back and look at games from the early '80s and early '90s and today, they all have similar elements. It's just the graphics and what the games have been capable of and what's been able to be rendered in that game. Really, it's technology that has been driving the visuals, which in turn drives the gameplay elements that are capable of being rendered onscreen and that are being conveyed to the player.

OPM Do you feel a responsibility to the player to try to break some of those consistent elements?

AS Absolutely. There's one thing that, personally, I like to do with game development: We like to evolve games. There are evolutionary games and revolutionary games, and I'd say we definitely make evolutionary games. We want to make a game with those elements that are proven and fun to players, and then we want to improve that and take the system's capabilities so we can really turn it up a notch. In this case, we wanted to take that hack-n-slash gameplay and turn it up. It's more than just hitting the X button. Now there are combos and more visual flair and variety. But it's more than we can convey over an interview—we can't wait for people to see it and check it out.

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Language
Violence

XBOX

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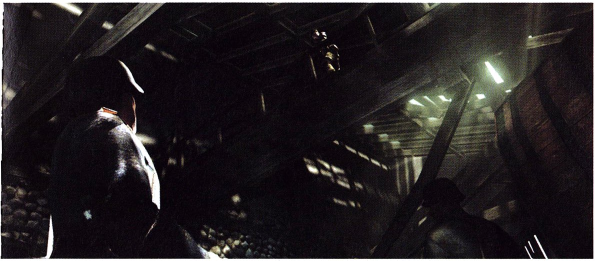
TO DYE FOR

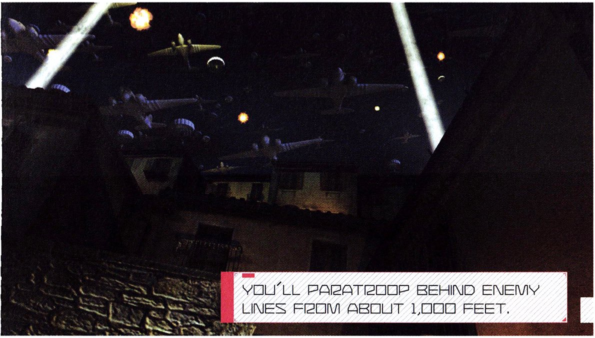
Airborne's painstaking authenticity is largely due to Capt. Dale Dye, who has been the military technical advisor for the last seven *Medal of Honor* games.

PUB. EA Games DEV. EA LA RELEASE PS3 Launch

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

THE HALLOWED WORLD WAR II FPS SERIES TURNS THE PS3'S GAZE SKYWARD





YOU'LL PARATROOP BEHIND ENEMY LINES FROM ABOUT 1,000 FEET.

TAKE TO THE SKIES ONLINE

EA promises that *Airborne* will have significant online play, but the company isn't releasing details except a hint that the online experience will be built largely around four-player co-op.

It should come as no surprise that Electronic Arts is bringing a new installment of *Medal of Honor*—its celebrated series of World War II first-person shooters—to the PS3. What might come as a surprise is that the company is taking the opportunity to introduce some major innovations to the series, the kinds of innovations few would expect from the gaming behemoth anymore.

The *MOH* franchise debuted in 1999 for the PS1 and was inspired by Steven Spielberg's grittily honest and detailed portrayal of World War II in his film *Saving Private Ryan*. Spielberg's DreamWorks Interactive initiated development of *MOH*, though the game was turned over to EA when DreamWorks' software arm closed. And at its release, *MOH* was lauded for its excruciating detail and immersive sense of combat. Executive Producer Patrick Gilmore says this quality and eye for detail isn't likely to end with *Medal of Honor: Airborne*, which continues the evolvement of the series' open-ended gameplay (a structure introduced in 2005's *Medal of Honor: European Assault* for PS2). "The PS3 lets us do many things we couldn't before, starting with [being able to create] more realistic locations. Instead of fighting in levels, you are now fighting in real places, real locations," says Gilmore. "*Europeans Assault*'s open-level design was one of the best-received features of that game, and because of it, our understanding of the benefits of open and realistic level design is more refined. In [*Airborne*], we plan to take it a step further."

Typical of the *MOH* series, *Airborne*'s action starts in dramatic fashion, this time in the sky. You play as Pfc. Boyd Travers of the 82nd Airborne Division, and your first view is from a plane as you look down at the European landscape from about 1,000 feet, waiting to paratroop behind enemy lines. After hearing the order to jump, you do so, and then you must control your parachute to guide yourself down to the designated jump target. Once you make it to the ground, your mission begins. The point at which you land will affect the story. (Sicily and Germany are among the campaigns you'll tackle in *Airborne*.) "The significance of your own tactical decisions takes center stage and becomes immediately obvious once you play a real drop zone," says Gilmore. "The easy confidence of constantly running in the direction of live bodies, present in the past game and within the WWII FPS genre, quickly disappears."

The PS3's power naturally means that strikingly realistic characters populate the game, but to Gilmore and the *MOH* team, more realism presents a new set of challenges. "You'll see much higher emotional fidelity in the characters. They have become so lifelike that the emotional performance will need to be balanced so that the tone of that performance has an appropriate level of violence," says Gilmore. "We are finding it possible to deliver world-driven AI. The Germans and Allies in the game respond to their environments, not just to the design abstractions of path nodes and cover points." |

PUB. Midway DEV. Midway Chicago RELEASE Fall

STRANGLEHOLD

TEQUILA SHOT

Before making guilty pleasures (*Face/Off*, *Paycheck*) and plain crap (*Hard Target*, *Mission: Impossible II*), John Woo made some pretty impressive action movies. Two of the best are *The Killer* (where Chow Yun-Fat plays a remorseful, yet badass, assassin) and *Hard Boiled* (where Chow Yun-Fat plays an unremorseful, yet still badass, cop). This is significant because while many games are adaptations of movies, a scant few (we can think of only *Tron 2.0* for PC/Xbox and the upcoming *Scarface*) are actual sequels to established movies. *Stranglehold* is not only one of Midway's initial offerings for the PS3 (in addition to *Unreal Tournament 2007*), it's also a bona fide sequel to *Hard Boiled*.

Go ahead, snag a copy of *Hard Boiled*—we'll wait. Recall that crazy gunfight at the end when Chow Yun-Fat takes out a bunch of bad dudes in a hospital with an infant in his arms? Now imagine that sort of gunplay and editing, but done on the PS3 and controlled by you. That's Midway's aim with *Stranglehold*.

The two principals of *Hard Boiled*, John Woo and Chow Yun-Fat, are both involved with *Stranglehold*. Chow Yun-Fat reprises his role as badass supercop Inspector "Tequila" Yuen and lends both his likeness (carved in scary PS3 polygonal power form) and his voice. Woo's involvement comes in the form of cut-scene direction and overall story—which means that no matter how the game turns out, at least we know that the cut-scenes won't be boring instances of characters nodding their heads at each other while talking.

> TEQUILA SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO CRAZY STUNTS LIKE RUN UP WALLS.

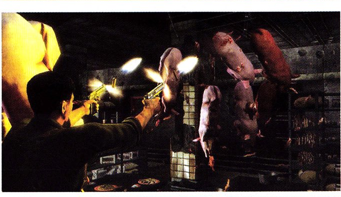
Besides the Hollywood treatment, the core game will be a third-person action title, replete with guns, bullet time (er, called "Tequila time" here), and even vehicles. In true John Woo fashion, Tequila should be able to do crazy stunts like run up walls, perform back flips off chandeliers, or (via Tequila time) aim and shoot while driving.

Additionally, thanks to the power of the PS3, not only do the gunfights look slick, but the environments are also, in theory, completely destructible. A key point the development team (which, interestingly enough, is the same team behind that fine mental action-shooter, *Psi-Ops*) emphasized is destroying the enemy's cover. Imagine the environmental chaos of games like *Black* or *Red Faction*, but powered by the PS3, and you have a good idea of what the team is aiming for.

Stranglehold plans to use whatever mythical online abilities the PS3 has, as it will have an online multiplayer mode. Everything in single player—the environment battering and crazy gunplay acrobatics—is supposed to make the transition to the online play. Of course, this is all dependent on Sony's yet-to-be-revealed online strategy, but it's nice to know that the team is hoping to let you wield dual pistols while flipping off walls, all within the wonderful world of Internet gaming. |

EXIT THE MATRIX

If Chow Yun-Fat had accepted the offer he received to play the role of Morpheus in *The Matrix*, we might have seen him in a videogame or two before now. But he turned it down, so we didn't.



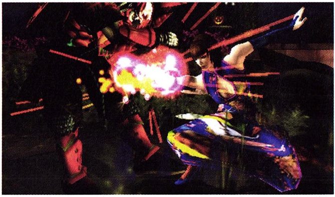
TEKKEN:
DARK RESURRECTION

IN THE PALM OF YOUR IRON FIST

PUB. Namco DEV. Namco RELEASE Summer

It's surprising that the PSP hasn't already been bombarded with fighting games, but the gates have opened and many are now making their way over, including *Tekken*. Thankfully, Namco recognized that people don't want mere ports of PlayStation 2 games on the PSP, so the PSP version of *Tekken*, called *Dark Resurrection*, isn't just a port of *Tekken 5*. It has two completely brand-new characters named Lili and Dragunov, as well as a huge cast of returning characters from previous *Tekken* games, such as old favorites Heihachi and Jin Kazama.

Dark Resurrection also has 19 stages with some interactive objects that you can smash should you be fortunate enough to pummel your enemy's face into the dirt near such an item. Additionally, some of the customization features from *Tekken 5* are included, so you can add different items to your character and then take them online in ad hoc mode to show your opponents. There are twice as many items in *Dark Resurrection* as there are in *Tekken 5*, but they cost money that you earn by playing through the main portions of the game. The only other new feature is the addition of minigames—because you can't release a PSP game without minigames; they scream "portable fun!" At any rate, the game is looking good and *Tekken* fans will finally have a portable fix beyond the lackluster GBA version of the series. |



PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Guerrilla RELEASE Winter

KILLZONE: LIBERATION

A TACTICAL MOVE

The PSP is often called a portable console—and it does provide more console-comparable graphics than any handheld yet—but the truth is that some types of games just work better on it than others do. Because of this, developers Kojima Productions changed up the *Metal Gear* series when it went portable, and it's encouraging to see that Guerrilla has opted to do the same in bringing *Killzone* to PSP.

Killzone: Liberation is set just a couple of months after the end of the first *Killzone*. Playing as Jan Templar, you'll be tasked with facing off once again against the evil Helghast, and in particular Gen. Metrac, who has taken a group of hostages in an attempt to cement his power.

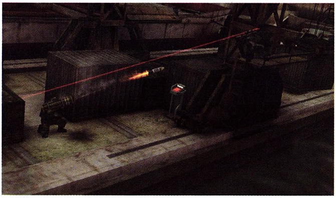
While the story line, characters, and weapons will be familiar to players of the first game, there are a lot of changes being made to gameplay. One of the first and most obvious ones (which you'll have already noticed if you looked at the screens below) is that the game uses a third-person view this time. While *Killzone* fans may find this a travesty, we're somewhat relieved, as we've yet to see a great game on PSP that uses a first-person perspective. The other major change is that the gameplay will be a lot more tactical. You'll be able to survey the scene, and then, based on what you see the Helghast doing, make choices about the best ways to save the hostages from Metrac's clutches.

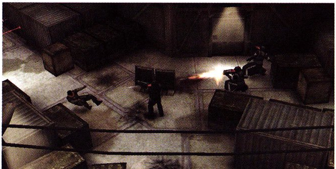
There's no official word from Guerrilla yet on multiplayer, but our prediction is that it will be for up to four players, and our hope is that it will offer gaming via infrastructure mode rather than just ad hoc. Whatever the case, we're excited to see what else the game has in store—stay tuned for a hands-on in the coming months.

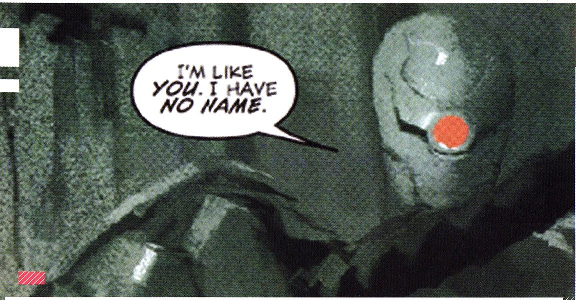
YOU'LL BE TASKED WITH FACING OFF ONCE AGAIN AGAINST THE EVIL HELGHAST.

KILLER MOVIE

Rumors continue to fly around about the possibility of a *Killzone* movie, including the chance of it starring Will Smith, but so far, nothing has been confirmed.



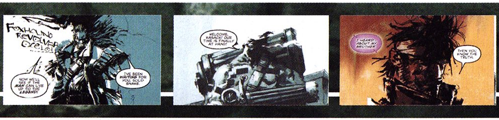



I'M LIKE YOU. I HAVE NO NAME.

PUB. Konami DEV. Kojima Productions RELEASE Spring

METAL GEAR SOLID DIGITAL COMIC

SNAKE BREAKS NEW GROUND


FOXHOUND REVOLVER OCELOT
NOW WE'LL SEE IF THE MAN CAN LIVE UP TO THE LEGEND!
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU SOLID SNAKE.
WELCOME, KASACK! OUR TIME IS FINALLY AT HAND!
I HEARD... ABOUT MY BROTHER.
THEN YOU KNOW THE TRUTH.

It seems so obvious when you think about it: a comic for the PSP, enhanced with sound, motion, and, most important, interactivity. But Konami is the first publisher to explore a new way to extend gamers' experiences with a cult favorite. Drawn by artist Ashley Wood, who has worked on the print *Metal Gear* comics, and written and produced by Hideo Kojima and Noriaki Okamura, the story is a retelling of the first *Metal Gear*. Does it sound a little cheesy? It actually works surprisingly well, thanks to the sharp art direction and polished pacing. Sounds of gunfire, for example, are accompanied by a frenzied flurry of classic comic "rat-tat-tat" text.

Beyond the great narrative is another layer: a sort of collecting game that subtly introduces new story hints. Players will be able to scan each panel for more clues to deepen their understanding of the narrative; scanned elements will pop up, and by clicking on them the player can add those clues to the "library." Each collectible item is another piece of Snake's story, unlocking more hints about the character, his backstory, and his family and relationships. Frankly, we were universally impressed; if Konami starts a trend with this experiment, which comes out this spring, we're all for it. |

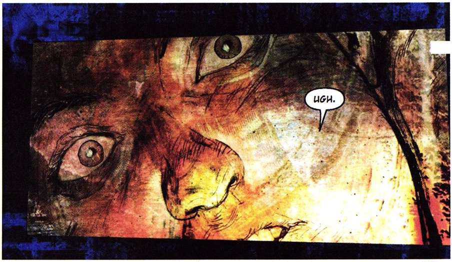
PUB. Konami DEV. Konami RELEASE Spring

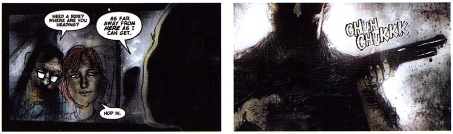
THE SILENT HILL EXPERIENCE

FROM GAMES TO BEYOND

Imagine having not only an all-new, high-quality, superbly drawn digital interactive comic, but also a collection of content that spans all four *Silent Hill* games, clips of interviews with the director and composer of the upcoming *Silent Hill* feature film, as well as other extras related to what has been called the scariest series of all time. That is *The Silent Hill Experience*, and it is yet another promising Konami experiment in the medium. The story is written by Scott Ciencin, whom fans already know for his other *Silent Hill* comics; the art, which has an edgy, sketchy style, is by Steve Perkins and Alex Shibao.

As in the *Metal Gear* comic, hand-drawn, still images are deftly manipulated to create motion and depth. Pieces of art are layered over each other to create a 3D effect, sometimes elements are pushed around to evoke motion, and sound effects add a critical component. Stylistically, alternating uses of close-ups and panoramic panels create drama. The total effect of what we've seen so far is dynamic and visually arresting—not to mention exquisitely creepy—and it seems pretty much just like what you'd expect an animated *Silent Hill* comic to be. More like this, please! |




NEED A RIDE? WHERE ARE YOU HEADING?
AS FAR AWAY FROM HERE AS I CAN GET.
HOP IN.
CHUH CHUKKK

THE PLAYSTATION UNDERGROUND: ARE YOU MISSING SOMETHING?

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PLAYSTATION UNDERGROUND

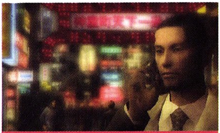
US.PLAYSTATION.COM

YAKUZA

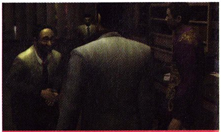
A DAY IN GANGSTERS' PARADISE

PUB. Sega **DEV.** Amusement Vision **RELEASE** Fall

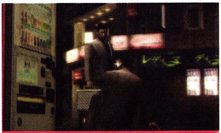
Do you think *Grand Theft Auto* could be a little more…Asian? Did you kinda like *Shenmue* but wish you were doing something more substantial than looking for sailors in a meticulously modeled 1986-era Tokyo? Well, someone at Sega listened, because in Japan, the company made *Ryu Ga Gotoku* (which translates to "Like a Dragon"), often described as "*Shenmue* featuring yakuza, with a dash of *GTA*." Sega recently announced the game's name for its U.S. release, the bold and simple title of *Yakuza*. So how do the yakuza roll? Here are some snippets from a typical day.



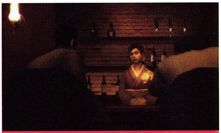
A piece of the opening movie, which helps establish that "authentic Tokyo feel" that *Yakuza* is going for. While *Yakuza* takes place in a fictional part of Tokyo, these screens make us feel like we're walking around in the Kabukicho district.



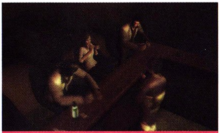
A scene from the first chapter of the game, in which the main character, Kazuma Kiryu, is collecting some money. The president of the Peace Finance Corporation is saying something like, "So honored to meet you!" Kazuma replies, "Cut the bulls*** and hand over the money." Kazuma's curt manner earns him a fight sequence.



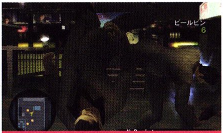
This is Kazuma walking around with a suitcase full of money that he just collected. Some fool bumped into him on the street, and Kazuma is telling him to, er, make haste with the departure, to put it in more polite terms.



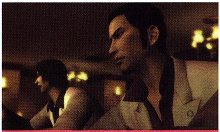
This is a high-end hostess bar where Kazuma's best friend, Nishkiyama, hangs out. The hostess whom Kazuma is talking to will play a key role in the story.



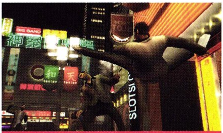
Another shot in the same bar where Kazuma and Nishkiyama hang out. The girl in the middle is Yumi, a childhood best friend of both Kazuma and Nishkiyama. This is *Yakuza*'s version of a "best friends 4-eva!" moment.



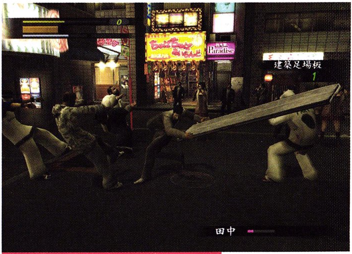
A quick example of *Yakuza*'s combat system. The development team at Amusement Vision built the combat engine from the ground up, and it's loosely modeled on the *Virtua Fighter* engine. Note the fact that Kazuma is wielding a beer bottle in this fight.



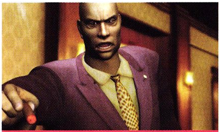
Kazuma and Nishkiyama hang out and enjoy (crime) life at the hostess bar. Hostess bars are places in Tokyo where guys hang out and drink with pretty girls, who are hired by the bar.



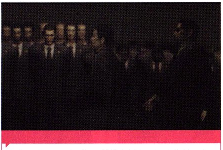
Kazuma demonstrating a finishing move, which is, as you might have guessed, an übermove that usually ends a fight.



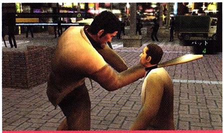
Here's a fight sequence in which Kazuma uses some scaffolding to fend off some other bad dudes (demonstrating how the environment can be used during combat). The top yellow bar is Kazuma's health, the middle bar is a sort of experience meter (you can upgrade skills when that bar is full), and the bottom light-blue bar is your "heat gauge"....



Shimano, one of the leaders of the yakuza clan, is now yammering about some missing money and is really having a fit. A key plot point in the game.



Look at the man in the middle facing the left. That is Kazama (not to be confused with our man Kazuma), who is the overall boss of the yakuza clan. This is a big yakuza meeting.



This is a demonstration of one of the special moves that's tied to your "heat gauge." When your heat gauge is full, you can pull off slick moves. Note the blue halo circling Kazuma as he smacks the crap out of this dude.

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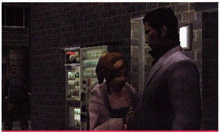
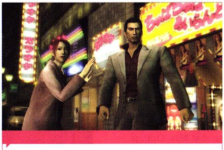
←場の選択→
数字ｷｰ or ↑↓Bet
D:100P P:100P

DEFINITION, PLEASE

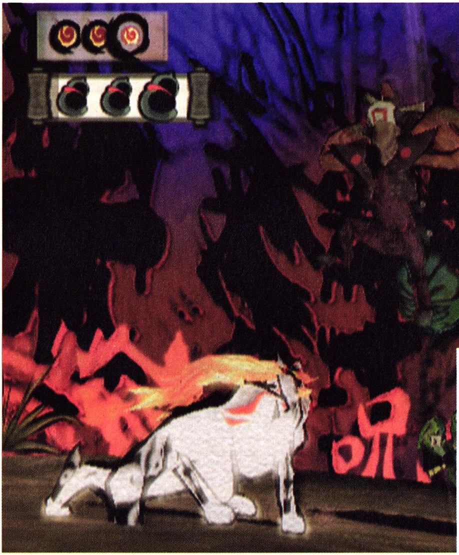
Yakuza are members of traditional Japanese crime groups, which are often compared to the Mafia organizations of Western culture. Roughly translated, the term means "good for nothing"; it originated from oicho-kabu (a Japanese card game much like baccarat) and refers to the worst possible hand in the game.



This is a plot point: The girl asks Kazuma for some "help from a stalker," except that the "stalker" behind her is actually her pimp. They're both trying to jack our boy Kazuma.



This girl's scam demonstrates that while people generally respect the yakuza enough to ask for help and protection, some people use that token of respect as part of a con job.



PUB. Capcom DEV. Clover Studios RELEASE May

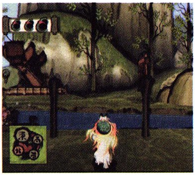
OKAMI

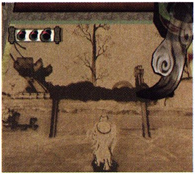
CALLIGRAFIC!

If you've been following *Okami*'s development at all over the past year, you already know how the game's unique style provides it not only with a distinct look, but with some interesting gameplay elements as well—namely the calligraphy. What's cool about this particular aspect of the game is that it applies to so many things within *Okami*'s world. You can use it to help townspeople, solve puzzles, defeat enemies, and do all of the other things that apply to being a god in dog form.

But you can't magically wave the brush like Picasso and have masterpieces suddenly appear. In fact, you have to earn the ability to perform certain kinds of strokes. For example, you won't earn the cutting stroke—which is useful for attacks, as well as cutting boulders, wood, and other such objects in half—before you solve the puzzle with the statue holding the broken sword. You complete this puzzle by drawing the broken part of the sword on that statue. Now you can go back to the beginning of the demo and cut the peach down from the massive tree and watch the colors wash over the once dark world. It's worth pointing out that other puzzles are pretty straightforward—you'll have to look into the stars and complete constellations by adding a single drop of paint, which is easy as can be.

It's at this point that the townspeople start to need your help as life resumes its course. Some of the things you can do with the brush may not be so obvious, but they can go a long way toward improving your status around town. For example, you can draw a drying pole between two sticks so that Mrs. Orange can dry her clothes. There are plenty of tasks such as this awaiting you, designed to make you explore and try different things with the brush. Try them out for yourself in the demo! |





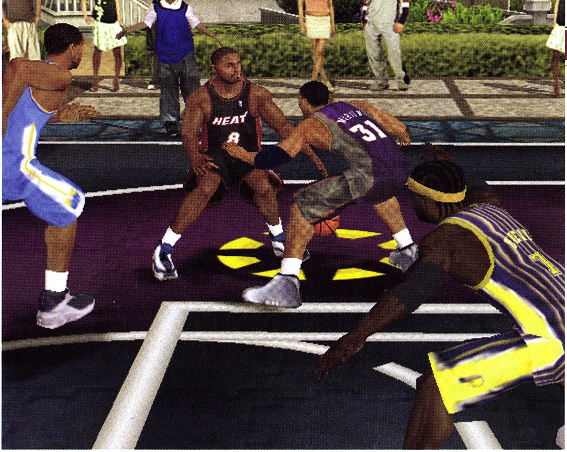
PLAY IT NOW

PlayStation
BLACK
PlayStation 2

Try out the beauty of *Okami*'s calligraphic combat for yourself with the demo on the disc!

THE LEGEND

The name Amaterasu is taken from the Shinto religion's name for its sun goddess. The name literally translates to "she who shines in the heavens." Amaterasu's brother is the god of storms; his name is Susanowa.



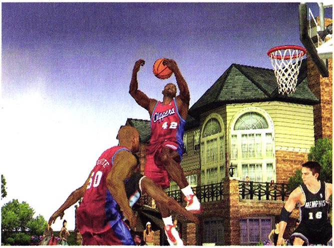
PUB. Midway DEV. Midway Chicago
RELEASE April

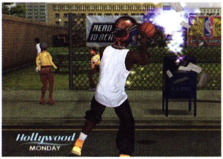
NBA BALLERS: PHENOM

YOU'RE GOIN' TO HOLLYWOOD!

It's hard to find a genre that Rockstar's übersuccessful *Grand Theft Auto* franchise hasn't so wonderfully corrupted. Now the idea of a go-anywhere, do-anything environment heads to the sports department (of all things) in *NBA Ballers: Phenom*.

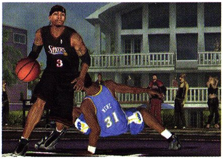
Here the entire city of Los Angeles acts as your court, which includes downtown, swanky Beverly Hills, and star-studded Hollywood. Also, expect La La Land to be one happenin' place. "The game is set during a fictional NBA Finals week, so everyone is there, including the 'who's who' of NBA athletes, music celebrities, coaches, agents, and media," says executive producer George Gomez. "You can walk around L.A. neighborhoods and interact with people, stores, and vendors."



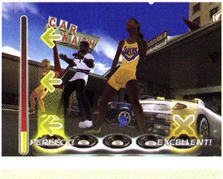


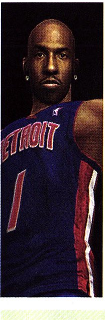
But it ain't just about getting up close and personal with these bigwigs; the metropolis is also jam-packed with side events not related to basketball. We're talking about snapping photos of NBA players, attending concerts, and helping out the Laker Girls with a celebrity car wash (think of a *Dance Dance Revolution*–like minigame, but with more soapy suds). Doing these side events can earn you extra cash to buy gear and even increase some of your stats. Additionally, the type of events you participate in will greatly affect *Phenom*'s final outcome. Start taking on more roundball-focused events and you'll probably wind up the next No. 1 pick in the NBA draft. Spend more time with the celebs, however, and watch your character build the foundation for an entertainment empire à la P Diddy's.

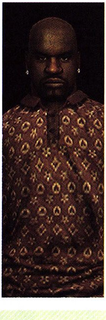
ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHANGES ON THE BLACKTOP IS THE ADDITION OF 2-ON-2 MATCHUPS.



And, oh yeah, you'll still be playing some actual basketball. The biggest changes on the blacktop are the addition of 2-on-2 matchups (the first *Ballers* only had 1-on-1 games) and the ability to equip your character with gear that can both improve *and* hinder his stats. "Not all of it is beneficial," explains Gomez. "Shaq's Diesel sneakers increase the player's shot blocking and low-post offense but reduce his long-range shooting attribute." We wonder if Shaq's kicks make you miss every free throw (and despise Kobe), too.







ROLEPLAY!

There's a Career Aptitude meter on your bio page that tells you in which direction you're headed. Designer John Vignocchi explains: "The mechanic is similar to what you have in [Xbox] role-playing games like *Fable* and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* [that models your general morality]."

KINGDOM HEARTS II

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE March

How do we know that *Kingdom Hearts II* is almost here? Because we just loaded a fresh new copy that Squenix sent us, and Donald Duck speaks English! No more weird Japanese Donald! We can (mostly) understand what he's saying! That means that we're just one issue away from reviewing a crazy big action-RPG that fuses light shows (*Tron*), stop-motion animation (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*), animal *Hamlet* (*The Lion King*), and Keira Knightley (*Pirates of the Caribbean*)! Here's one more last pretty image to tide you over until our review.

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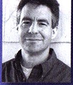

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REVIEWS

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76

MGS3: SUBSISTENCE

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

GAME OF THE MONTH

SNAKE'S ALIVE!

RATING KEY

No more blargs, octagons, or whatever you've called them—now we're sticking with straight-up numbers. And any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well...at least they're fun to rip apart.

INSIDE

PS2

81 24: The Game
82 25 to Life
82 Beatmania
80 Drakengard 2
78 FIFA Street 2
79 Fight Night Round 3
82 Final Fight: Streetwise
83 Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure
78 MLB 06: The Show
86 Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams
80 Sonic Riders
80 Tokyo Xtreme Racer Drift
78 Torino 2006

PSP

90 Exit
90 Fight Night Round 3
95 Generation of Chaos
88 Metal Gear Acid 2
89 Pursuit Force
94 Samurai Warriors
90 Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max
92 Street Supremacy
94 Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code
89 WRC: FIA World Rally Championship

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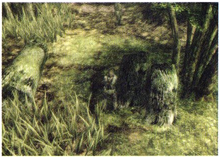
GAME OF THE MONTH



PUB. Konami DEV. Kojima Productions ESRB M MSRP $39.99

MGS3: SUBSISTENCE

SNAKE'S ON A PLANE

While Hideo Kojima and many other designers are trying to make games that either emulate or even elevate themselves over what Hollywood produces, they're also starting to adopt one of Tinseltown's more annoying attributes: the double dip. Just as new versions of cult films like *Evil Dead* seem to pop up every year or how a crazy 72-disc ultra boxed set follows a single-disc DVD just four months later, so have games started to be rereleased with extras. Fortunately, games like *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition* and *Ninja Gaiden Black* (on Xbox) offer some pretty good improvements to the original release, but they pale compared to what Kojima and his team have done with *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*.

The biggest change is the addition of a new, *Splinter Cell*–style 3D camera that is movable via the right analog stick. *Snake Eater* is an awesome game despite the fact that the *MGS* series' traditional bird's-eye view often limits visibility, necessitating the player to switch to the first-person view just to spot enemies. With *Subsistence*'s new, closer-to-the-ground camera, the game instantly looks and plays a lot better. Environments actually seem more impressive and lush, and scouting an area becomes much easier. In fact, this change has made several boss battles significantly less difficult. Previously, the challenge of tranquilizing (not killing) each boss proved quite difficult, but now it's easier to see where they are and tranq them. The best example is the fight against The End—a tense sniper battle spanning multiple maps that took me over 40 minutes to complete in *Snake Eater*. Now, with the new camera, I can easily scan the horizon to see where The End is hiding and then aim and shoot; the fight takes at most 20 minutes to finish. Also, an incredible chase sequence near the end of *Snake Eater* that uses a fixed camera looks kind of odd in *Subsistence* because you can move the camera to show angles that were previously unseen. Despite the boss battles and this chase, the camera doesn't make the game exploitatively easy (à la the changes made to the original *MGS* in *MGS: The Twin Snakes* for the GameCube). After all, if you feel the game is too easy, there's always European Extreme mode.

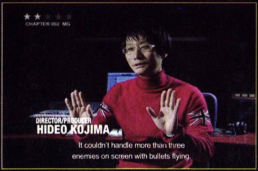
ONLINE RANGES FROM SOLID MULTIPLAYER FARE TO A TOTAL BLAST.

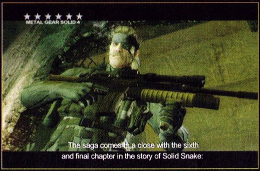
Besides the new camera and some quirky new camouflage, the core *Snake Eater* game is still the same. That's disc one. On disc two, you have extras, such as some very funny parody movies, duel mode (in which you can play individual boss battles, some with special rules), and ports of the first two *Metal Gear* games. Playing these games is quite amusing, as you'll notice that *Metal Gear*'s basic gameplay principles haven't changed too much during the span of the series, from its days on the MSX gaming system to the recent PS2 installments. But the most significant addition that disc two brings is the online multiplayer.

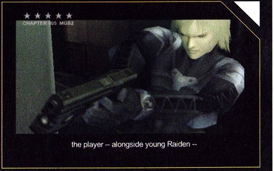
SNAKES IN THE GRASS

The finally realized Metal Gear Online (as Kojima calls it) ranges from solid multiplayer fare to a total blast. The three teamplay modes—team deathmatch, Capture the Kerotan (frog), and Rescue the Ga-ko (duck)—resemble the teamplay options of other games. The maps

SNAKE SAGA

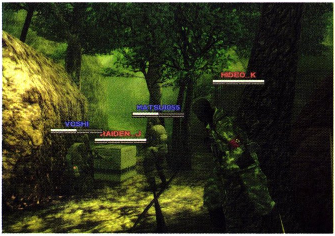

CHAPTER 002 MG
DIRECTOR/PRODUCER
HIDEO KOJIMA
It couldn't handle more than three enemies on screen with bullets flying.

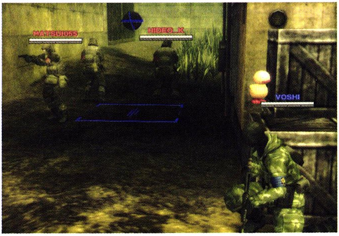

METAL GEAR SOLID 4
The saga comes to a close with the sixth and final chapter in the story of Solid Snake:



If you were smart enough to preorder your copy of *Subsistence*, then you get an additional, limited-edition disc: *Metal Gear Saga Volume I*. This is a 28-minute documentary about the *Metal Gear* universe (spanning from the two *Metal Gear* titles to the *Metal Gear Solid* trilogy), in which Ryan Payton, international manager at Kojima Productions, gets to run around with a camera and have Kojima himself explain some of the concepts and backstory ideas for the franchise. For example, Kojima explains that *MGS3* is focused on "maternity" and how he originally thought that Boss would have a cobra tattooed on her breast. When her chest is exposed in battle, the snake would appear to "laugh" due to her body moving as a result of recoil from her gun. This would tie in to a legend that says, "If you saw the snake laughing, that means you are about to die."

Though that tattoo ultimately didn't make it into the game, it makes us think that maybe Kojima is a fan of the manga *Lone Wolf and Cub*; in it, a certain female assassin has a tattoo of a demon and a suckling babe on her breast that intimidates the men she kills. Anyhow, this is just one crazy Kojima nugget, and you'll find plenty more in this documentary, which you'll get if you preordered the game.





are decently designed, with some best suited for eight-player (which is the limit) fragfests and others better suited for matches with fewer players.

What elevates the online component from entertaining to awesome is the rescue mission mode. Think of it as a variant on *Splinter Cell*'s spies-versus-mercs mode—except it has up to seven soldiers facing off against one badass (Snake). Playing as the soldiers requires clear communication and decent teamwork. Playing as Snake requires knowing how to use your gear (such as regular camouflage and a battery-powered cloaking device) and your skills (close-quarters combat) to maximum advantage. A bad Snake player can be caught pretty easily, but a good one can do slick things like stun multiple soldiers via CQC, drop magazines to delay pursuers, or simply disappear and lie in wait for someone to take out. Whoever "kills" Snake will get to play as him in the next round, so make sure your host sets the rules to allow for more than two or three rounds in rescue mission mode.

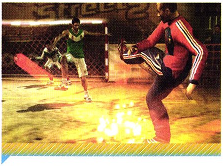
One thing that needs to be mentioned is that the online play is very *MGS*-centric, meaning those who know *MGS* will have an easier time than those who don't. To elaborate, the *MGS* franchise is one of the few that can get away with keeping the Circle button as "Yes" and the X button as "No" for menus and the like (this is often one of the earliest changes in localizing a game from Japan to the United States); it's also a franchise in which you fire your weapon with the Square button. So if you've played a lot of other action games that use the triggers for firing weapons, the whole "Square button, not R1" thing can take a while to get used to (and you can't change this). You also cannot move and shoot at the same time in first-person view. If you've been playing single-player *MGS*, this isn't a difficult transition. But no matter whether you know the *MGS* controls or not, the fact that the Select button is used for voice chat is actually quite annoying—you basically can't move and talk at the same time this way.

If you've already played and finished *Snake Eater* the first time it came out, there is, honestly, enough extra stuff to warrant the double dip. The whole package (meaning the three-disc version, of which disc three is a three-and-a-half-hour *MGS3* movie composed of the game's cut-scenes reedited into one continuous story, plus the bonus disc detailed in the "Snake Saga" sidebar above) has enough content to justify snagging it. Now, if you've finished *Snake Eater* a couple of times, don't have your PS2 hooked up to the wild and wonderful Internet, and are tight on money, that might be worth reconsidering. Otherwise, though, *Subsistence* has succeeded in making a great game even better. | *Thierry Nguyen*

VERDICT The gold standard for future potential double dips.

SCORE 5|5

SECRET THEATER
Perhaps our favorite extra is the secret theater, which is made up of zany movies that Kojima Productions made for fun. We particularly like the one about The End falling in love with Eva, and the one where the director of the CIA gets payback for being snubbed by Snake.



FIFA STREET 2

A SPORT YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT, URBANIZED. AGAIN

PUB. EA Sports DEV. EA Canada ESRB E MSRP $49.99

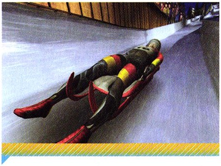
It's worth recapping for a second and acknowledging the problems with the original *FIFA Street*. Although very successful and a noble attempt at broadening the appeal of soccer games around the world, it was, at best, boring. The gameplay lacked depth, and it wasn't really much fun. It was fine for a quick five-minute kickabout, but beyond that, it was just dull.

Enter the sequel, along with lots of EA bluster about "arcade action blended with the passion and flair of real street soccer." It's essentially the same as the original, though, only now it comes with more bells and whistles to keep you occupied when you're not scratching around looking for some substance on the pitch. Build a character with the now-familiar EA doohickey, play a little dress-up with licensed duds, and then work your way through a reasonably well-paced career mode that's absolutely soaked in contrived urban 'tude. Additionally, there's now a pitch creator, which uses similar morphing technology to the character gizmo, and a reasonable amount of enjoyment can be had building the skankiest, dirtiest-looking urban soccer hole imaginable.

However, the real meat of the game still suffers from the same issues as the original. Although there are plenty of tricks and right-stick shenanigans to be had, the whole soccer-that-feels-a-bit-like-basketball thing just doesn't feel right. It's substantially more enjoyable when playing against a friend (as all soccer games are), but the pitches feel too small, and the action is just too fast. Adjusting to the notion of soccer being a fast-paced, end-to-end game is hard, and frankly, it doesn't work any better this time than it did the last. On-pitch gameplay is supplemented with tricks challenges to keep things varied (a lot like the juggle challenge in *FIFA 06* on PSP), but at the end of the day, despite all of the effort clearly put in to make it otherwise, *FIFA Street* is *still* boring. | *John Davison*

VERDICT More stuff than the first one had, but it's still not that great.

SCORE **2.5** | 5



TORINO 2006

HOPE YOU LIKE SKIING

PUB. 2K Games DEV. 49Games ESRB E MSRP $19.99

Ah, the Olympic Games, where the world's best athletes gather to represent their countries in the spirit of friendly competition. A competition—according to this game—in which you do almost nothing but ski.

Torino 2006 technically features 15 different Olympic events. But you can actually boil them down to five categories: downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, ski jumping, speed skating, and bobsled/luge. So you've got 10 different skiing events and a handful of other stuff. It's worth noting at this point that developer 49Games is known for its skiing titles.

What's here is quite good, honestly. Each event controls a bit differently, and the strategic, timing-based scheme for cross-country skiing and speed skating, in particular, really requires a bit of skill. These events balance out the more simple sports, like luge and bobsled, where getting a good start and keeping off the walls are really all that's required to get a medal.

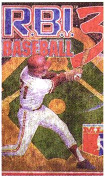
Oh, *Torino* also loses points for not including the most interesting events in the sports that are here—short-track speed skating and skeleton (where fools hurtle down the luge course headfirst).

The whole thing is so watered down. Even the multiplayer mode won't hold your interest for long, since there's no real event variety. And you don't get any of the pageantry to go along with the greatest sports spectacle in the world. I'm not saying I want parades or an Olympic Village drinking minigame, but at least getting to hear my national anthem when I win a gold medal would be a start.

It would have been great to take an entire team to the Olympics and partake in every event from start to finish. Unfortunately, that's just not possible with *Torino 2006*. There's a Jamaican bobsled team joke in here somewhere, but I'm too disappointed to figure it out. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT A good time for 20 bucks, but it should have been a much better game.

SCORE **2.5** | 5

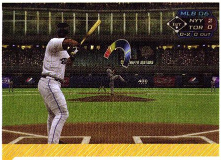


MLB 88?

No matter how much fun the new baseball sims are, cult NES classic *R.B.I. Baseball* remains a staple at many a gaming night. While it has its flaws, it's still incredibly fun. Do a little sleuthing online, and you can even find cracked versions with updated rosters...not that we condone that sort of activity.

SPORTS WE WANTED

Snowboarding would have been really nice. Hockey would have been just as good. Or how about figure skating or curling? Don't laugh—Konami's excellent *ESPN International Winter Sports 2002* featured those last two events.



MLB 06: THE SHOW

BEST OF THE ALSO-RANS

PUB. 989 Studios DEV. 989 Studios ESRB E MSRP $39.99

You know those ball clubs that pump just enough money into their operations to keep fan interest high but never seem to make the playoff leap? Well, in the world of videogame baseball sims, that's Sony's *MLB* series. For years the *MLB* games lingered in mediocrity before stepping it up recently. But despite some solid improvements, they've always trailed behind the *MVP* and *2K* series in terms of overall entertainment. This year is no different.

MLB both hits and misses with the basics. The *MVP*-like meter-based pitching system is good, but an extra button press for each pitch makes the process feel clunky. The hitting, though solid, now feels antiquated next to both *MVP*'s and *2K6*'s new, intuitive, analog-stick-based swing systems (though *MLB* deserves props for its "guess the pitch" feature). On the field, the action is smooth and generally responsive; unfortunately, the baserunning game suffers from runners that lack situational logic.

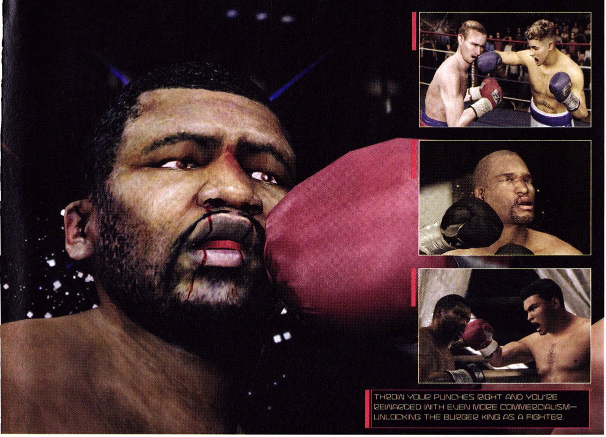
New this year is a King of the Diamond mode, a timed, pitcher-versus-batter minigame in which the pitcher has a few seconds to chuck the ball and the batter then hits it out among a variety of targets to score points. Though I can see its appeal, it wasn't really my thing. The new Rivalry mode fares better, letting two players each choose a team and then play a series of adjustable length against each other, recording stats throughout.

MLB's greatest strength (outside its excellent animations) still lies in its career, franchise, and season modes. Depending on your preference, you can tackle a season as short as 14 games or bring a created player through his whole minor- and major-league career. It will likely keep players busy crunching numbers and banging buttons well into the real-life season.

Like those almost-contender clubs, *MLB* has its ups and downs, and while it offers some decent pick-up-and-play fun, you might consider jumping on the bandwagon of a proven winner. | *Greg Ford*

VERDICT Another solid, yet unspectacular, entry to the baseball-sim lineup.

SCORE **3** | 5



THROW YOUR PUNCHES RIGHT AND YOU'RE REWARDED WITH EVEN MORE COMMERCIALISM—UNLOCKING THE BURGER KING AS A FIGHTER.

PUB. EA Sports **DEV.** EA Chicago **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

HALF A MILLION DOLLAR BABY

With this, its third iteration, the consistently excellent *Fight Night* series comes face-to-face with challenges every sports franchise grapples with: How do you keep a game fresh when you're essentially offering the same product? And can you avoid making serious design missteps in the process?

For the most part, *Fight Night Round 3* acquits itself well. The basic game—which was great to begin with—is still there, delivering gripping fights jam-packed with bone-jarring hits and sudden turns of fortune. The excellent total punch control system is back, with the addition of two new and completely inconsequential superpunches. The training minigames are back, too, but thankfully, they take place in an actual gym and not last year's *Moonraker* cocktail lounge.

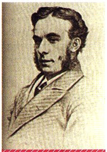
So, what's new and notable? You could point to the Rivals mode that lets you relive great boxing rivalries, but the really key things are more subtle. Most important, the AI has been significantly improved, making each fight much more of a contest and, consequently, much more likely to go the distance than those in the knockout simulator that is *Round 2*. *Round 3*'s customizing options are also much improved over last year's, letting you choose (and unlock) a variety of stances, defensive styles, punching specialties, and more. As a result, fights are much richer, tactical experiences.

Round 3 sounds like a no-brainer pickup for *Fight Night* fans, but it's not. You need to use your brain because some of the choices EA has made detract significantly from the experience. The rankings sheet is completely gone, thus robbing you of the satisfaction of working your way up to a title shot; instead, you have a vague feeling of progress tempered with confusion. Not so rewarding. Worse, not only does a potentially lethal injection of commercialism subject you to literal in-game commercials, but most of the trophies are corporate sponsored, meaning you can win the pointless Burger King trophy but not one for being Knockout King or Fighter of the Year. That just sucks.

In the end, the good outweighs the bad, but next year's model really needs two things: zero sponsors and the horsepower of the PS3 so that it can match or beat this year's superior Xbox 360 game. | *Robert Coffey*

VERDICT Just better enough than last year's game to warrant a purchase. Just.

SCORE 4|5



SMACKTIME

The Marquis of Queensbury rules, which are still used today in boxing, were established in 1867 by the Marquis of Queensbury, John Sholto Douglas. The rules expressly forbid hugging inside the ring, but they don't legislate love outside of the squared circle.

Disney
SQUARE ENIX
New allies

SONIC RIDERS

PORCUPINE RACETRACK

PUB. Sega **DEV.** Sonic Team Tokyo Software
ESRB E10+ **MSRP** $39.99

Putting Sonic the Hedgehog into a racing game always makes sense on paper but never seems to work. *Sonic Riders*, in which the spiky blue thing and his posse jump onto hoverboards and shred gnarly courses, does not break this trend.

Different characters can make special use of different track features. "Speed" characters like Sonic can ride rails. "Power" characters like Knuckles can bash through barriers. "Fly" characters like Tails can launch themselves into aerial sets of rings that let them bypass tricky sections of track.

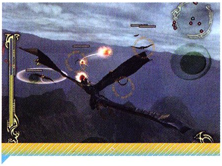
Again: sounds good on paper. But *Sonic Riders* fails for a variety of reasons. You never really feel like you're controlling the racers, but rather just making suggestions that they follow or ignore at their leisure. And the single-player game is extraordinarily difficult from the onset. The main game features only six racetracks, and you'll spend literally hours playing the same race over and over as you get mauled by the computer.

You can follow along in an enemy's wake, or "turbulence," and do a few basic snowboard-style tricks to boost your speed. But let's say you're heading into a hairpin turn that you have to take perfectly or else you'll fall off the track and go immediately, irreversibly into last place...and then another racer leaves a turbulence trail. Now you're sucked into his wake, which conveniently disappears halfway through the turn with no way for you to stop.

If you do complete the story mode, you'll unlock alternate versions of the stages, more racers like Cream the Rabbit, and a minichallenge-filled mission mode similar to *Crazy Taxi*'s Crazy Box but harder and not fun. The multiplayer modes range from boring to unplayably bad—my friend and I eventually just gave up on the battle mode when we weren't able to hit each other. I don't even think he's my friend anymore. | *Chris Kohler*

PROS It's not *Shadow the Hedgehog*
CONS Shoddy controls, excruciating difficulty, a focus on memorization over skill, "turbulence" effect hurts more than it helps

SCORE 2|5



DRAKENGARD 2

MIXED-BREED DOG

PUB. Ubisoft **DEV.** Cavia **ESRB** M **MSRP** $49.99

Imagine if *Panzer Dragoon* and *Dynasty Warriors* had a child, but it was a little on the slow side. That'll give you an idea of what the *Drakengard* series is all about. One minute, you're flying above the clouds, struggling with the controls as you attempt to take down griffons and zeppelins, and the next, you're mindlessly whacking away at the X button for minutes on end as you mow down fields of soldiers. And some missions combine the two—during a ground fight, you'll occasionally be able to hop onto your dragon and rain down death from above.

You're not *just* running around slashing up hordes of identical enemies, though. Quite often, you'll find yourself in mortal battle against a particularly strong creature or two that need to be handled with more strategy—parrying, blocking, sidestepping. Unfortunately, the camera system that works fine for mindless hacking and slashing is garbage for close-in combat.

In fact, it's quite easy to get cornered by a couple powerful enemies during a midboss battle and die almost instantly, which makes the lack of midmission checkpoints a real pain. Some missions are brief, but some can last for quite a while. At least you get to keep all your experience points when you continue, so it's never a total loss.

And it certainly doesn't help matters that *Drakengard 2* is an ugly, ugly game. The aerial battle sequences *all look identical*—generic, featureless landscapes against an empty sky. On the ground, things aren't much prettier—barren towns, blocky brown mountains.

Drakengard 2's concept is still unique and clever; that can't be denied. And the story, while hackneyed, is translated well. It will find its share of cult fans, but even they will have to cop to its laundry list of failings. | *Chris Kohler*

PROS Unique concept, you get to keep XP when you die
CONS Graphics are ugly, flying sucks, camera sucks, gameplay is boring

SCORE 2.5|5

PlayStation.2
街道

XTREME INFLUENCE

Up until now, all of the games in the *Tokyo Xtreme* series have been based on Genki's Japanese *Shutokou Battle* series. *Drift* is the first in the series based on Genki's *Kaido Battle* games, which are all about racing over mountain roads.

I'M CRYING ALREADY

Drakengard 2 developer Cavia will join forces with Hironobu Sakaguchi's company Mistwalker to create an action-RPG for Xbox 360 called *Cry On*. Published by AQ Interactive, the game tells the story of a young girl and a giant monster made of sand.

SP
00'17"933
BRAKE

TOKYO XTREME RACER DRIFT

MORE LIKE AN APOLOGY THAN A TITLE

PUB. Crave Entertainment **DEV.** Genki
ESRB E **MSRP** $15.99

Developer Genki has taken the battle off the Tokyo highways and into the hills for the latest slip-slidin' automotive adventure in the series. Too bad all the same issues still plague this sequel.

Drift has a two-tiered approach. Run sanctioned events during the day in order to build your reputation and earn cash that can be spent on upgrades for dozens of licensed cars. Upgrade the engine, the suspension, or just the look of your ride with body kits, paint jobs, and so on.

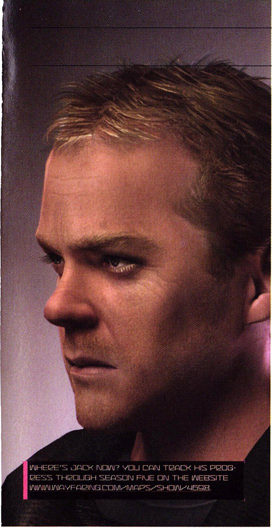
At night, it's time to enter the underworld and make your name as an illegal street racer on the winding mountain passes. Taste victory in head-to-head hill climb and downhill events as you wrestle your way around the sharp curves and steep inclines.

The title "Drift" is appropriate, but mostly for the wrong reasons. The cars in *Tokyo Xtreme* don't so much break traction during a slide, since they never really feel like they have any traction at all. Even going down the straights, the cars feel floaty and tend to weave as you struggle to get them pointed in one direction. It's the same problem that every other *Tokyo Xtreme* game has suffered from, but exacerbated by the super-sharp turns and narrow roads found in *Drift*. At least on the other games' wide highways you had room to correct yourself and slide out a bit in the turns. Here, when you've only got one lane between you and a guardrail, the experience is that much worse.

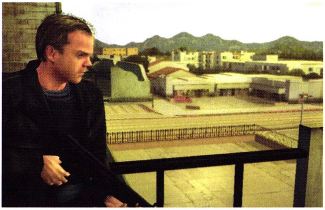
Tokyo Xtreme aficionados will probably cry foul on this. If you already have a handle on *TXR*'s, er, handling, then maybe *Drift* will be pretty playable. Considering how far racing-game physics have come, though, it's sad that the *Tokyo Xtreme* games still make you feel like you're driving on a sheet of ice. | *Greg Sewart*

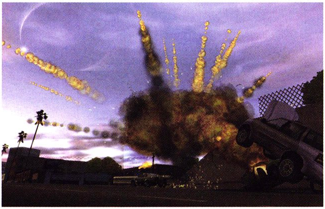
PROS Narrow, winding roads take *TXR*'s already bad handling and make it feel that much worse.

SCORE 3|5



WHERE'S JACK NOW? YOU CAN TRACK HIS PROGRESS THROUGH SEASON FIVE ON THE WEBSITE WWW.WAYFARING.COM/MAPS/SHOW/4698.





PUB. 2K Games DEV. Studio Cambridge ESRB M MSRP $39.99

24: THE GAME

EVENTS ARE REAL-TIME AND REAL AWESOME

On television, where the usual FCC standards apply, Jack Bauer is probably the most badass character of all time, but in the wider pond of videogames, he's got a lot of competition. Once you've seen Solid Snake single-handedly take down a Hind-D attack chopper, what's left for Bauer to do?

Hint: Jack doesn't get a missile launcher.

24: The Game is a generally successful badass simulator in which developer Studio Cambridge astonishingly managed to replicate the intense feeling of the show while not watering down Bauer's character. You will storm a terrorist base, escape, and then *go back in again* to rescue a friend before everything blows up; you'll do it without even a bulletproof vest for protection; and you'll do it NOW because millions of innocent lives are at stake. It's fantastic.

The gunplay is the main attraction here, and the developers were smart enough to give players the benefit of the doubt. If the aiming controls were off (usually the chief bugbear in third-person action games; see *Dead to Rights* and *Grand Theft Auto* for more), Bauer would feel a lot less cool than the player knows he is after seeing him unhesitatingly kill every terrorist in a room before one can even unholster his weapon. But it's dead on, allowing you to instantly switch back and forth between targets from a cover position.

Not quite as dead on are the driving sequences, which would have benefited from some kind of *Burnout*-like retaliation option. Instead, you're forced to take the buffeting you get from enemy vehicles en route to your next destination while trying not to crash. The game handles the CTU analysis segments—a collection of tense minigames—better. If the action lets you feel just like Jack, the analysis stuff lets you feel just like Chloe (for better or worse).

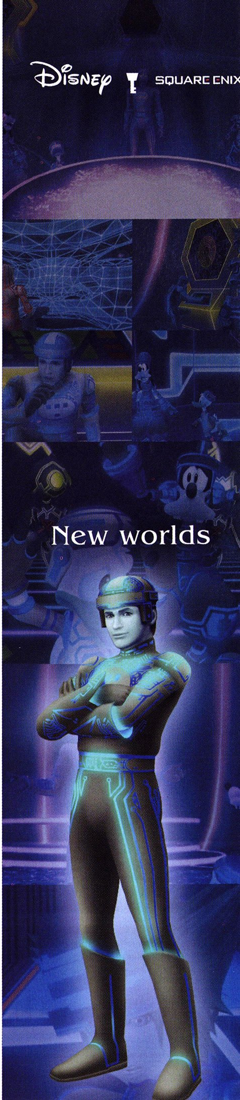
The game's story, written by the show's writers, is also top-notch, with the requisite last-second plot twists. All the major characters are represented, and if they don't look entirely natural, it's at least the best the PS2 could have done. Play this game, or the terrorists win. | *Nich Maragos*

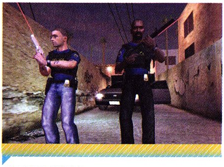
BAUER Great gunplay, true to the show
SOUR Awkward driving scenes, occasionally eerie character models

SCORE 4|5

PALMER LITE

Since the story line takes place after season two, President Palmer isn't in the game much. While that does mean a dearth of Dennis Haysbert's awesome portrayal of the fictional president, on the bright side, it also means Sherry Palmer is completely absent from *24: The Game*, which almost earned it another half-point.





25 TO LIFE

DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE

PUB. Eidos DEV. Avalanche Software
ESRB M MSRP $39.99

25 to Life is a towering achievement in incompetence the likes of which we may never see again. This run-and-gun shooter plays as if it were designed by a team of furtively posturing 13-year-old suburban white boys. As a result, everything is overplayed into caricature—the swearing, the music, the 'tude, the prolonged death sequences, and more. Not overdone: the art direction, which is so rudimentary that it seems cribbed from the back pages of one of those boys' social studies notebooks (I guess it was either this or a game pitting dragons against WWII fighter planes). You could shake a box of rocks and do a better job approximating the human form in motion than *25 to Life* does (though, I confess, the choice to suddenly put one character's head on backward for an entire level is perversely inspired).

Could *25 to Life* do more things wrong? Short of infecting you with cold sores, no. The graphics, interface, and targeting reticule conspire to make the action unplayable, abetted in part by a damage model that somehow equates "bare-chested bad guy" with "bulletproof bastard." Forget about the alleged opportunity to choose to play as a gangster or a cop; in reality, you march through a crappy story as three different characters: Freeze, the antihero of the game who's trying to quit the gang; Detective Lester Williams, a cop who attended the same police academy as Steve Guttenberg; and a vicious gang leader with the thrillingly lethal name of Shaun (just like Shaun Cassidy, singer of "Da Doo Ron Ron" and *Matlock* guest star). My only hope of pleasure in this game was some sort of *Warriors*-inspired gang theme for Freeze and Shaun's 22nd Street D-Boys. But instead of a tribe of chest-implant-sporting trannies, I found myself gunning down hordes of bandana-wearing clones.

When the game ends after four or five hours, you could play multiplayer. Of course, you could hand-clean a turnpike rest room, too. They're a pretty even match in terms of enjoyability and effort. | *Robert Coffey*

VERDICT Insert "cruel and unusual punishment" or similar prison-term jokesterism here. Bonus points for working in the words "salad" and "toss."

SCORE 1|5

PERFECT 13
100%

BEATMANIA

DO NOT TAKE ME TO FUNKYTOWN

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami ESRB E MSRP $59.99

Konami's DJ game pretty much boils down to this: You will either love it or hate it depending on your taste in music. If you're expecting some rock, which you shouldn't be considering what the peripheral looks like, then you're going to be sorely disappointed. Most of *Beatmania*'s soundtrack is composed of dance music along the lines of trance and techno, with a few classic tracks thrown in. Even if you're a fan of those particular genres, you may find some of the selections a little lacking, either because they are just bad songs to begin with or they're not very well known.

You'll go through the soundtrack in the main part of the game pretty fast. *Beatmania* tries to dilute this problem by offering a couple of different modes, including a two-player battle mode as well as a mode that lets you use two tables at once. It has dozens of options that let you change the rules of a particular song. This will keep you playing a little longer for sure, but (again) how long depends on your taste in music.

In any case, playing *Beatmania* takes a little more skill than your typical rhythm game, but perhaps not so much more than something like *Guitar Hero*. The *Beatmania* peripheral—a mini DJ table—has seven keys, plus a disc for scratching at various points during a song. The regular mode uses just five of the keys, while Beatmania IIDX uses all seven. Interestingly, the seven-key mode actually seems a bit easier than the five-key mode at times, simply because the added keys seem to be more of a natural fit with each song, whereas the five-key mode seems to skip a few beats, making it a little harder to really get in rhythm.

People who like rhythm games will undoubtedly like the challenge offered by *Beatmania*'s harder difficulty settings and the cool peripheral. But *Beatmania* doesn't really offer the same visceral thrill as something like *Guitar Hero* or even any of the *DDR* games.| *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Cool peripheral, offers a great challenge in the hardest difficulty settings
CONS Soundtrack is lacking, most modes are relatively easy

SCORE 3|5

PlayStation
BLACK

PLAY IT

Curious if *Beatmania* is your cup of tea? Check it out for yourself on this month's disc.

KNOW YOUR ROOTS

Streetwise includes a lot from the original *Final Fight*. Cody, Mike Haggar, and Guy are in the game, as are many of the sound effects, such as the whistle that calls over additional bad guys. You'll also notice some familiar locations. But sadly, the emulation of the original *Final Fight*, which you can unlock, is absolutely terrible, and the fact that you have to buy a ticket to ride the subway instead of jumping the turnstile is an affront to gamers.

OLD-TIMER

The *Beatmania* series has been around for a pretty long time, at least in Japanese arcades. To date, there have been over 13 releases, including appearances on the original PlayStation and even Nintendo's Game Boy.

1:33 Ally Time
DECENT!

FINAL FIGHT: STREETWISE

WHY MUST YOU RUIN MY MEMORIES?

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom ESRB M MSRP $39.99

There's something strangely appealing about *Final Fight: Streetwise*, and it isn't the gameplay or graphics. It's mostly the little nods to the original *Final Fight* and other Capcom properties (such as *Street Fighter II*) that will put a grin on your face as you play through what largely amounts to an average beat-em-up with some nice voice acting and a story line that would make any '80s-era screenwriter jealous.

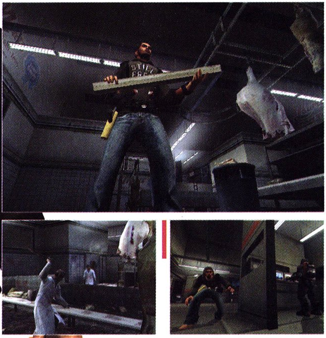
Much of the game is set up in a *GTA*-style free-roaming environment, where you have to interact with the citizens of Metro City and visit a variety of locations in different parts of the city. The world isn't seamless—the game loads when you move to a different section, and the areas are kind of small in comparison to a *GTA* game's vast city. Of course, that's actually a good thing, considering that you don't have a map to help you navigate through the monochrome alleys and slums. All the back-and-forth you have to do gets tedious and would make the game substantially more boring if the city were any larger.

Streetwise pulls off the actual brawling pretty well, and again, you may smirk a little when you see the main character and some members of the supporting cast execute familiar combos from the original *Final Fight*. The only real downside is that the upgrade system is worthless. You can pretty much get through most of the game without upgrading any fighting moves, instead relying on the combinations you start with. In addition, the AI can be pretty cheap, particularly foes equipped with firearms who like to take cheap shots at you from a distance.

Overall, *Streetwise* doesn't do anything remarkable. Fans of the original *Final Fight* may want to check it out for the many nods to that game and some marginally entertaining fighting mechanics. But if you aren't familiar with the original, then any one of the other beat-em-up clones released over the past several months by Namco and Capcom will fit the bill. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Good voice acting, somewhat entertaining story and fighting mechanics, nods to the original *Final Fight*
CONS Terrible graphics, feels tedious at times, cheap AI, not too different from most other recent beat-em-ups

SCORE 3|5



IF YOU AREN'T COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR COMBAT SKILLS, YOU HAVE THE OPTION TO PICK UP WEAPONS AROUND THE LEVEL.

PUB. Atari DEV. The Collective ESRB M MSRP $49.99

MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE

JUST LIKE GRAFFITI: TECHNICALLY IMPRESSIVE, ETHICALLY UNEASY

The good news is, parental watchdog groups and irate senators can rest easy: *Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure* probably won't be converting anyone to the graf-writer lifestyle. The bad news is...well, you can probably see where this is going.

Getting Up is good, but it isn't fun. It's divided into segments that involve acrobatically navigating your way around tricky environments, fighting rival crews and police through hand-to-hand combat, and writing graffiti, and the game handles all of these things well. Combat at first feels indistinct and arbitrary, but once you grasp the flow and timing of it, the hits feel solid and brutal, unlike in a lot of street-brawling games. The game's AI is pretty good, too; if you're not careful, enemies will gang up on you rather than sit idly by to attack you one by one.

Even better than the combat are the controls for the regular exploration part of the game, which are intelligent and intuitive. The Collective worked hard to make sure players never have to fight the controls to get where they're going; not so easy is figuring out your route.

And this is where the game starts to falter. Main character Trane's "intuition" power is decent, but the spotty camera frequently fails to show just where those bright glowing markers he's supposed to head to are—this can be especially disastrous in timed levels like a train-jumping sequence. The actual tagging controls are pretty cool, but here again, the camera sometimes sets itself up at angles where it's hard to see which parts of your piece still need some work.

Ultimately, *Getting Up*'s most serious problem is that it's so damn serious. There's none of the anarchic joy found in *Jet Set Radio*; your enemies consist of vicious rival gangs in dark slums or grousing public transit workers just trying to keep the cars clean. Even when the fascist CCK police come on the scene spouting dialogue like "Art is a crime!" it feels like Ecko and co. have begged the question of whether this even qualifies as such. If art is self-expression, and *Getting Up* truly expresses the graf writers' soul, they may have inadvertently made the best case not to be one. | *Nich Maragos*

RIGHT PLACE All the mechanics are well executed

WRONG TIME The tone is off, making the game less exciting than it could be

SCORE 3.5

HELLO
my name is
EGM

DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME

Since it was announced and shown long before its eventual release, *Getting Up* attracted lots of media fire for its pro-graf message. Atari's solution? The longest pregame disclaimer ever.

Disney
SQUARE ENIX
New adventures

Disney
SQUARE ENIX
Kingdom Hearts II
The story isn't over.

SQUARE ENIX
www.kingdomhearts.com
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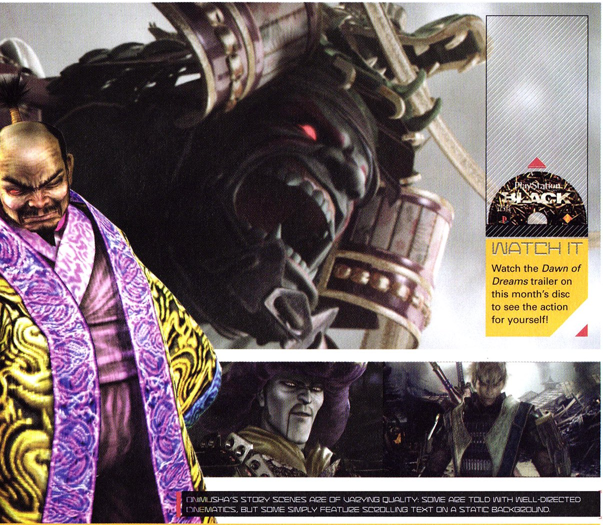
Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas © Touchstone Pictures. Characters from FINAL FANTASY video game series: © 1990, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005 Square Enix Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. SQUARE ENIX and the SQUARE ENIX logo are trademarks of Square Enix Co., Ltd. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

PlayStation 2

bvg
BUENA VISTA GAMES

EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Blood
Use of Alcohol
Violence



ONIMUSHA'S STORY SCENES ARE OF VARYING QUALITY: SOME ARE TOLD WITH WELL-DIRECTED CINEMATICS, BUT SOME SIMPLY FEATURE SCROLLING TEXT ON A STATIC BACKGROUND.

WATCH IT

Watch the *Dawn of Dreams* trailer on this month's disc to see the action for yourself!

| PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom ESRB M MSRP $49.99

ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS

LOVABLE NEW DEMONS

***Dawn of Dreams* is the** first *Onimusha* game that I've been able to play for more than a few minutes. The character-locked control scheme is what always killed the series for me—I didn't like it in *Resident Evil* 10 years ago and I hate it now. But it's a new era and a new *Onimusha*, and the natural, cameracentric controls help make *Dawn of Dreams* an enjoyable reinvention.

The concept hasn't changed that much: Slash your way through feudal Japan, slaying endless waves of demons and collecting their souls as you watch beautiful, cinematic scenes. The presentation is exquisite; though many cut-scenes are rendered in real time, they are directed quite well. The English voices are decent, but I appreciate the fact that you can flip on the original Japanese track.

Throughout most of the game, you'll play as Soki. But you'll also collect four new playable characters along the way, each with unique weapons and attack styles. At certain times during the adventure you'll head out with a partner; pressing L2 will let you change the character under your control. The ability to revisit old levels, bringing new characters back to get items that you couldn't reach the first time through, means you'll always have a lot to do.

New RPG elements have been added, so characters gain strength and new abilities as they rack up kills. And all that killing feels perfect; combat is tight and satisfying, especially once you begin to master your MP-consuming special moves. Having to constantly move the camera to get the best view of the battles is annoying, though.

If anything really drags *DOD* down, it's the boss battles. Some of them are done right—you need to be smart enough to figure out the weak point, then quick enough to exploit it. But often, I found myself unable to do more than a few points of damage at a time, chugging health potions for minutes on end as I chipped at the boss' massive health bar.

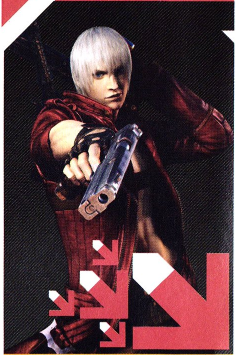
Luckily, the forgiving continue system lets you start any battle over with no penalty. This makes *DOD*'s challenges more addictive than frustrating, and it's hard to see any action fans being disappointed. | *Chris Kohler*

PROS Control system finally overhauled, beautiful presentation, solid combat

CONS Occasional camera issues, boss fights can drag the fun down

SCORE 4|5

EXTRAS



DEVIL MAY CRY 3:

DANTE'S AWAKENING–SPECIAL EDITION

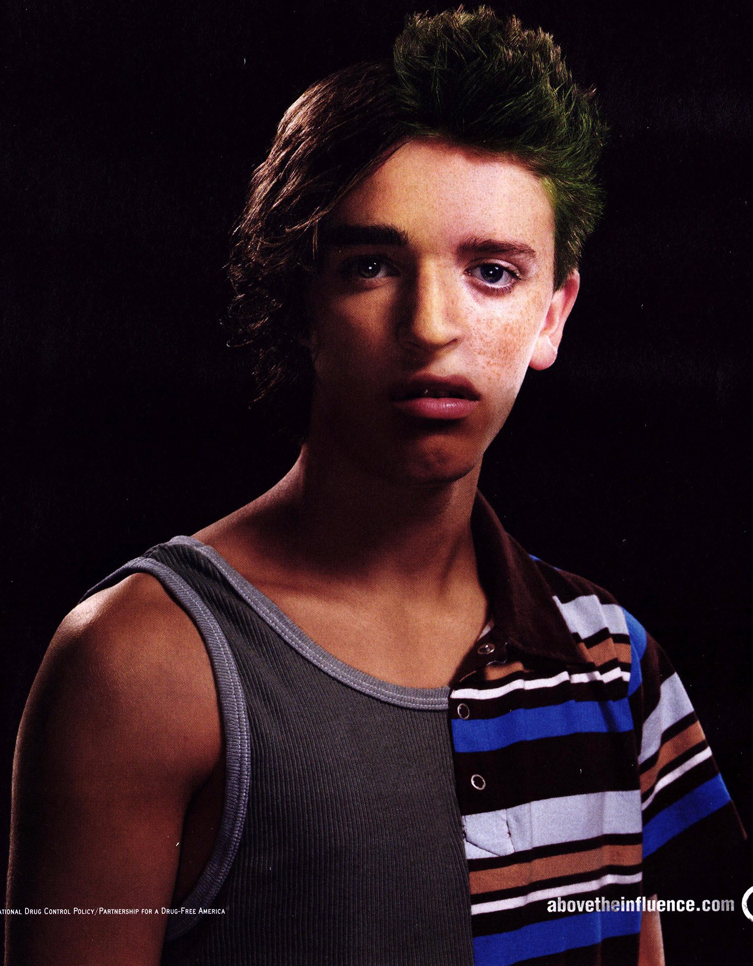
THE PERFECT GIFT FOR THE DEVIL MAY CRY FAN

As if you needed another reason to own *Devil May Cry 3*, Capcom has gone and released a special edition that includes the original game as well as several extras and some tweaks that improve upon the original version of the game. The cool thing is that these extras and tweaks are actually pretty good, and they certainly more than justify the game's price tag. For one, you can now play as Dante's brother, Vergil—who has his own set of moves and plays a bit differently than Dante—through the game, though no new story elements are introduced in this mode. There's also Blood Palace mode, which is essentially a survival mode that tests even the most skilled of players, as well as a speed increase option, which lets you play the game at "120 percent" speed—it sounds like a gimmick but it's quite fun.

But perhaps the biggest changes from the original game to the special edition are the save system and the overall difficulty. Some complained that the original game was too hard, and as such, Capcom has added a new save option that makes the overall experience a little less brutal since it doesn't require you to spend orbs to purchase continues. Additionally, the overall difficulty has been adjusted, making enemies who were once enormously annoying now less so. So, if the original *Devil May Cry 3* seemed too intimidating, you have no reason not to rush out and buy this version. As for *DMC3* veterans, the new content is certainly worth the $20 price. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

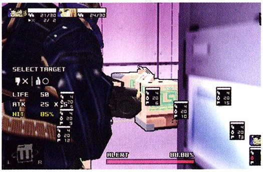
| PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom ESRB M MSRP $19.99

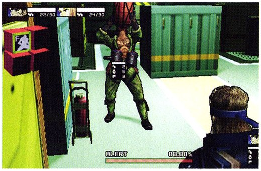
So if you let other people, piece by piece,
make you into what they want, even if it's
stupid, what happens to you?

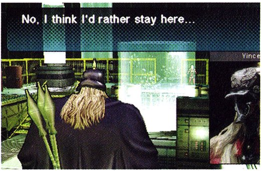


Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America

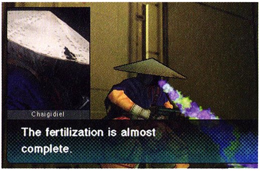
abovetheinfluence.com



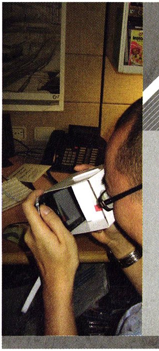




No, I think I'd rather stay here...

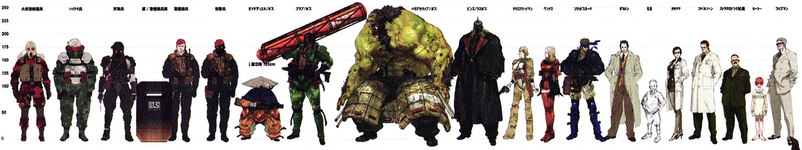


The fertilization is almost complete.



THE GOGGLES DO SOMETHING!

Just how is it playing with the Solid Eye goggles? Cool at first. It's neat to watch cut-scenes from previous *MGS* titles and, yes, the videos of girls in bikinis messing around with knives and guns, all in 3D. It's also neat to see things like stairs and railings and security cameras "pop out" in 3D. Just not for a very long time, as playing with the goggles gave me a nasty headache and an unhealthy dose of eyestrain. But that could just be my aging peepers.



PUB. Konami **DEV.** Kojima Productions **ESRB** M **MSRP** $39.99

METAL GEAR ACID 2

ROYAL FLUSH

Hey, guess what? *Metal Gear Acid 2* is still a turn-based card game, à la *Metal Gear Acid*! Don't skip this review quite yet, as it's not only for fans of the previous game. *MGA2* has enough changes and tweaks to make it a bit more palatable to gamers who were put off by the card-slinging nature of *MGA*.

The first thing you'll notice about *MGA2*, besides the crazy colorful cel-shaded graphics, is that it has an actual tutorial. No longer are players just thrown into the game and told, "Yeah, go be Snake, except in a turn-based manner and with a deck of cards." Done in a style similar to the VR missions of past *Metal Gear Solid* games, these training missions make *MGA2* a whole lot more newbie friendly. Adding to this are the tweaked controls; the D-pad lets you directly move Snake square by square (rather than merely designating where you want him to end up and watching him go), and the face buttons help you do things like crawl on the ground, brush up against walls, and use close-quarters combat on nearby enemies. The overall pacing is actually improved, as the game gradually introduces new strategies and concepts, like deck editing, equipping weapons, and controlling multiple characters.

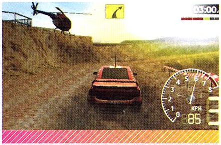
You don't even need to know what happened in the previous game, as the story starts off with Snake being grabbed by the FBI and coerced into infiltrating a defense contractor's headquarters. In fact, the whole plot is a lot more normal and easy to digest compared to the first *MGA*'s story about puppets hijacking airplanes.

While *MGA2* is a lot more newbie friendly, it still requires a fair bit of strategy. Like in a normal *MGS* game, you'll need to observe your enemy for movement and vision patterns, and figure out the best cards (out of a staggering 500 or so) to use. A significant improvement over *MGA* is the introduction of "linkage" cards—cards with special attributes. You can't use them by themselves, but if you use any sort of weapon, all the linkage cards you have in your hand are activated at once. It's pretty cool to save up four different linkage cards, use them all with, say, an AK-47 card on a strong enemy, and get effects like additional damage, knockdown, armor piercing, and arc fire in one hit. On top of linkage cards, there is the additional strategy of upgrading individual weapon cards (for example, making a gun fire armor-piercing bullets by default). And you have to cope with new card effects, like being covered in oil and hence unable to see your cards for a while. *Metal Gear Acid 2* is a good blueprint for how to make a sequel, as it expands its audience (by making it easier for newbies to get into) while providing significant improvements to the core gameplay. Plus, if you're into that kind of thing, you can ogle 3D videos of Japanese models fondling weapons with the bundled-in Solid Eye 3D goggles. Um, hooray mammaries? | *Thierry Nguyen*

PROS Slick look, revised controls, better pacing, lots of gameplay improvements over original

CONS Still plays a bit too slow, and it's still not the action-packed portable *Metal Gear* that most people want

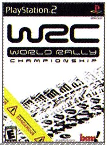
SCORE 4.5 | 5



WRC: FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

SPUTTERING TO THE FINISH

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Traveller's Tales
ESRB E MSRP $39.99



OK, it's time to whine about the PSP's design once again. While the system is perfectly suited to fine racing action—see *Ridge Racer* or *Burnout Legends*—the little analog nub is way too hard to wiggle with any sense of precision, limiting most of us to steering with the digital pad instead. And in a game like *WRC*, where traction isn't all that great, this results in tons of weaving as you try to straighten out the car and set up for the next turn.

Anyway, it's easy to get past that issue since the control is still pretty much what you'd expect from a rally game and the cars feel sufficiently heavy and powerful no matter what. No, the bigger problems here are the lack of collision consistency and the overall lack of speed.

WRC moves at a *crawl*. You never, ever get the sense of speed you should while careening over these narrow, uneven dirt roads or jumping over blind crests. While it's true that the lack of velocity makes it a bit easier to control something on the PSP's relatively tiny screen, it sucks the excitement out of the game as well.

The collision bit is way more irritating. See, most of the courses are surrounded by these ribbons that you can actually drive through, so you get conditioned not to worry too much about them during each race. That is, until you encounter an invisible wall behind one of them. Nothing is more frustrating than to be motoring along only to find the game's rules have changed on you all of a sudden.

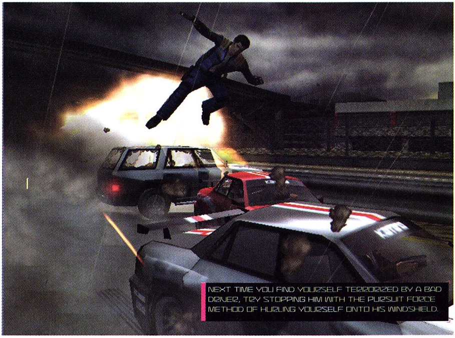
WRC is still a solid racing game despite its problems, and it's really your only option if you're dying for a rally fix on your PSP. But be forewarned that it just can't hold a candle to games like *Burnout Legends* or *Ridge Racer* when it comes to high-speed portable thrills. | *Greg Sewart*

BRITISH INVASION

You may never have heard of the *WRC* games, but the United Kingdom has seen about five of them so far on the PlayStation 2. Now-defunct publisher Bam actually released the first *WRC* game here in the States back in 2002.

VERDICT A decent racer that doesn't come close to fulfilling its potential. Still, it's currently the only choice for rally racing on the PSP.

SCORE 3|5



NEXT TIME YOU FIND YOURSELF TERRORIZED BY A BAD DRIVER, TRY STOPPING HIM WITH THE PURSUIT FORCE METHOD OF HURLING YOURSELF ONTO HIS WINDSHIELD.

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Bigbig ESRB T MSRP $39.99

PURSUIT FORCE

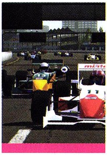
LEAPING LAW ENFORCEMENT

When I first heard the concept of *Pursuit Force*, I thought there was no way in hell the designers could pull it off. A game in which you jump at will between moving cars, bikes, and boats while shooting at bad guys—well, it just sounded a little too complex to work. So it was a nice surprise to learn that this fundamental game mechanic works amazingly well.

Too bad you just know there's a "but" coming up, don't you? Well, here it is: The mechanic is good, *but* the rest of the game doesn't work nearly as well. Oh, it starts off great. You're driving a slick speedster down a highway, and as you get near enemy vehicles, a little icon pops up; tap Circle and you'll leap effortlessly onto the hood or the back of the other car, from whence you can use your trusty sidearm to dispatch the driver (and any passengers) and take control of the vehicle. It's very simple and very satisfying, and there's enough strategy involved to keep things interesting.

The issues arise in, well, just about every other aspect of the game. For example, while the cars are great, certain segments require you to drive boats or motorcycles, both of which handle like complete crap. Even worse are the on-foot segments, which offer up a nice diversion but are absolutely horrendous in the control department. Difficulty imbalance hurts the game just as much as the controls: Some missions (especially boss battles) took me hours upon hours to complete...and then I'd beat the very next mission on the first try. Some missions have checkpoints, some don't—a fact that seems to bear no relationship to the mission's length or difficulty. I'm a big fan of variety, but it's present almost to a fault here; I kept hoping for more driving-jumping-shooting gameplay that never materialized.

So it's a testament to the strength of the game's fundamental premise that in spite of these major issues, *Pursuit Force* is still a pretty darn good time. It's not a classic by any means, but it's certainly a solid addition to the PSP's fairly skimpy library of original games. | *Joe Rybicki*

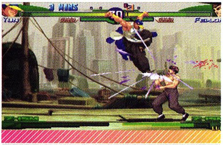


GAMEOGRAPHY

Though *Pursuit Force* is Bigbig Studios' first game, the studio was founded by former Codemasters employees. Their credits include the widely acclaimed *Colin McRae Rally* and *TOCA* series.

VERDICT While pretty seriously flawed and diverse almost to a fault, *Pursuit Force* is solidly entertaining at its core.

SCORE 3|5



STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3 MAX

THAT'S A LOT OF STREET FIGHTING

PUB. Capcom **DEV.** Capcom
ESRB T **MSRP** $39.99

If the *Street Fighter* series were to ever have a swan song—yes, we all know it won't—then surely *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max* on the PSP would be it. Not only is it just an excellent port of an arcade game, but it also has one of the best rosters of any fighting game to date, along with enough extras to keep any sort of fighting fan busy for hours on end. And yes, in case you're wondering, it is almost too good to be true. *Alpha 3*'s only downfall is the PSP itself, or more specifically, its D-pad, which doesn't really offer the total precision needed to execute moves the way that a game like this requires.

That's not to say that jumping or half-circle motions are totally impossible, because they're not. In fact, most middle-tier players probably won't even care, but if you're one of those people who wants to really master the game, then it'll prove to be endlessly frustrating. Even things as simple as jumps or three-quarter circle motions hit a snag every once in a while just because the D-pad requires a little bit of extra finesse than what most people are used to.

Purists probably won't be able to quite let go of that, but for the rest of us, it's still one of the best renditions of any *Street Fighter* game. It has enough entertaining modes—particularly the two kinds of dramatic battle options, one of which lets you tag in and out with a second fighter—to choke a donkey. And although online play is ad hoc only, it runs incredibly smoothly, which is crucial for a fighting game that requires precision timing. There are also three new available characters (taken from the GBA version of the game), and all of them look and play spectacularly.

If all *Street Fighter* ports were done with this sort of care and effort, people would have a much harder time claiming Capcom was trying to milk its fighting games to death. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Excellent visuals, sound, and gameplay mechanics; plenty of extra modes
CONS The PSP's D-pad isn't the most accommodating

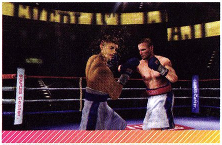
SCORE 4 | 5

BEHIND THE GAME

Want more *Fight Night* insight? Check out developer Kudo Tsunoda's blog at fightnightround3.1UP.com.

A SOLUTION

If you preorder *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max* through Capcom's website, then you receive a special D-pad attachment that sticks to the top of the PSP's regular D-pad. It does a decent job of minimizing the problems with the PSP hardware, although they're still somewhat noticeable.



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

THE POUND-FOR-POUND CHAMP

PUB. EA Sports **DEV.** EA Chicago
ESRB T **MSRP** $39.99

Don't let the "*Round 3*" title fool you—this is essentially last year's *Fight Night Round 2* in a handheld form. And you know what? That's just fine. In fact, while it doesn't fix the shortcomings of that game, I find it a more exciting, more involving boxing experience than this year's PS2 game.

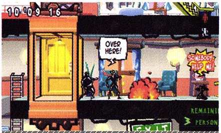
The bad news is old news. You can nurse along a career winning fights on points by relying heavily on incessant jabs and relentless body work. It's hard to understand how, in the year since *Round 2* came out, the designers have been largely incapable of programming opponents who will, at the very least, just cover up their guts should you stay crouched down and cracking their ribs and livers. Tactically, this is a weaker game than the PS2 version.

That said, the action is as fantastic as ever, if not better. The colors are deliciously rich, the controls remarkably effective, the customization as deep as in the console game, and the fighting brutally satisfying. Best of all, the trophies you win aren't all corporate-sponsored crap. Yeah, you can win a Dodge Caliber trophy, but you can also win trophies based on actual *achievements*, like knockouts and stellar defense. Another great feature from *Round 2* is the rankings sheet, which not only lets you follow your progress toward a title shot, but gives you the opportunity to control your career path to some extent as well.

Round 3 would've been great with just the career game, but the Rival Challenges—abbreviated classic bouts where you attempt to repeat or change boxing history—provide an outstanding alternative play mode. Trying to survive badass Joe Frazier as a beat-up Ali from the 12th round on is tough; trying to beat him or knock him out is insane, thanks to a better AI here than in the career game. | *Robert Coffey*

VERDICT As juicy and satisfying as a chunk of Evander Holyfield's ear.

SCORE 4 | 5



EXIT

POLL

PUB. Ubisoft **DEV.** Taito
ESRB E **MSRP** $39.99

Poll conducted at the sprawling *OPM* offices following the completion of *Exit*.

Q: What were your first impressions of *Exit*?

72% found the easy, mission-based design "perfectly suited for the PSP" with "a *Tetris*-like quality: starts out simple and gradually builds in complexity."

18% appreciated *Exit*'s "old-school 2D scrolling" and that the game serves as Taito's "clever remake" of its classic arcade puzzler *Elevator Action*.

10% didn't know.

Q: What is the object of *Exit*?

66% said "to get Mr. Esc out of buildings hit by disasters." Mr. Esc jumps across holes in the floor, climbs down ropes and up and down ladders, and negotiates obstacles in timed missions.

24% said it's "all that, plus Mr. Esc must rescue people who can then help him."

10% didn't know.

Q: What did you like most about *Exit*?

43% thought the colorful cel-shaded settings brought a "fun flair" to the game while the humor-laced gameplay managed to maintain a sense of urgency.

22% thought *Exit*'s accessible pick-up-and-play approach made it a perfect "anywhere, anytime" game.

15% found the level design "logical" and "genuinely challenging."

10% thought the two-player ad hoc connection "worked fine" with no noticeable lag.

10% didn't know.

Q: What did you like least about *Exit*?

34% found the gameplay "too repetitive, sometimes to the point of boredom."

33% found *Exit*'s controls "overtweaked" in places, resulting in moves that must be executed with "too much" precision.

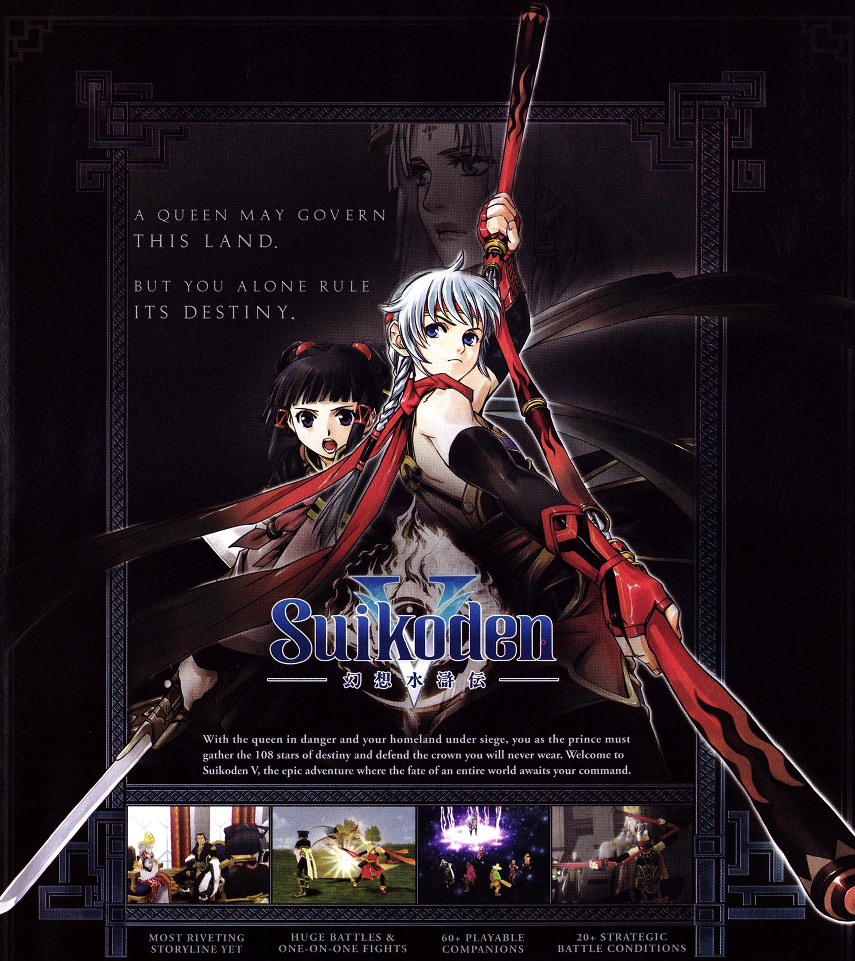
15% felt it was like "eating at McDonald's"—at first there's a feeling of satisfaction, but after an hour, the realization comes that nothing worthwhile happened.

8% felt *Exit* was a dressed-up version of similar puzzlers found "all over the Internet."

10% didn't know. | *Tom Byron*

ENTER A fun distraction for the PSP
EXIT Slow and repetitive, sometimes to the point of boredom. Just keep the sessions short

SCORE 3.5 | 5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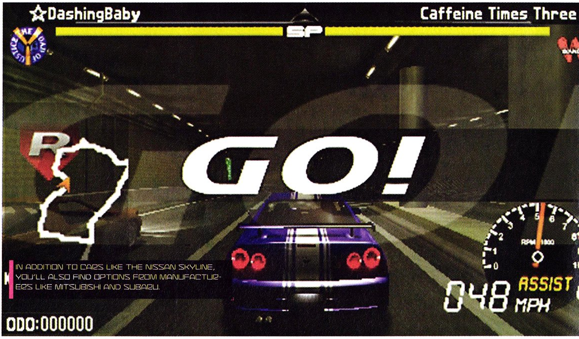

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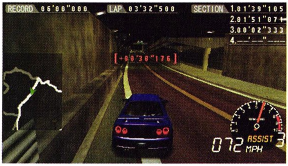

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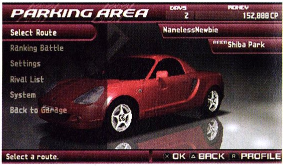

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BACK
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PUB. Konami DEV. Genki ESRB E MSRP $29.99

STREET SUPREMACY
TOKYO XTREME TURF WARS

The most important thing to know about *Street Supremacy* is that it is a portable *Tokyo Xtreme Racer*. Despite the name change, the game looks and plays exactly the same as the *TXR* console titles.

The cool thing about the portable version is the RPG-like turf war setup, in which you and your team attempt to dominate every area of the Tokyo highway system by challenging and defeating other teams. Lose your turf and your group disbands. In the meantime, you have to battle your teammates in order to move up the internal ranks and eventually take over your team. It's a very cool setup.

And of course, you can use money won to upgrade your collection of licensed rides with everything from better engines to funky vinyl and carbon hoods. The custom bodies, in particular, are important when you have a PSP game that looks this nice.

But eventually, you get out onto the highway and try to take you first turn. It's at this point you realize you might as well be driving on ice, because no matter what you do to your car, it will never grip the road to the point that you have any semblance of real control through the turns. Now consider the fact that making too much contact with retaining walls and other cars is actually one way to lose each race (even if you're leading by a mile), and you're in for one frustrating experience.

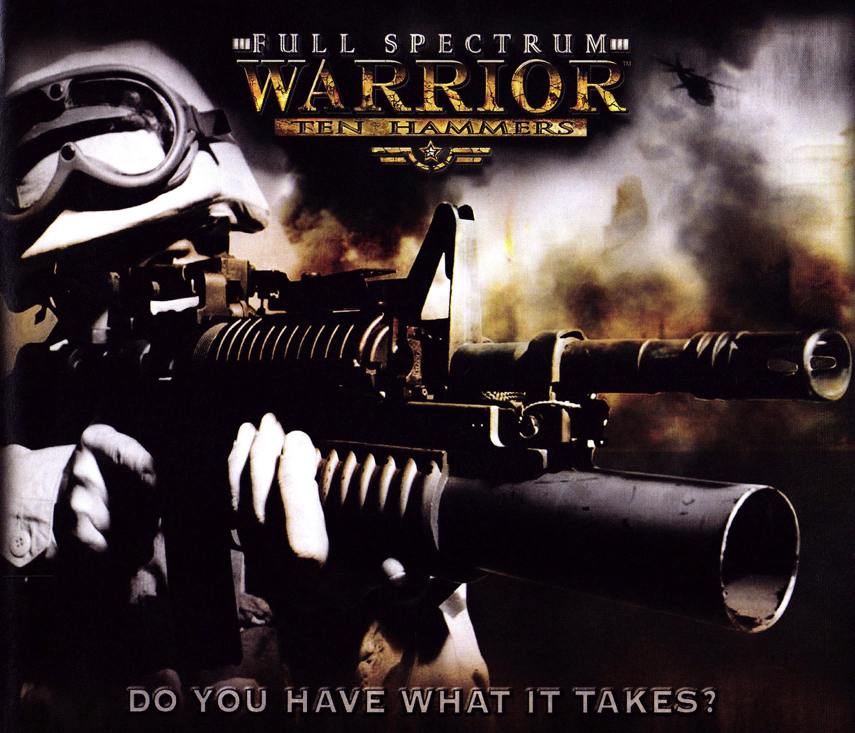
The long-running *Tokyo Xtreme* series is based on a fantastic idea. But you'd think that after so many games, developer Genki would at least attempt to fix the physics problems that have been plaguing its racing games for years. *TXR* buffs will likely be able to deal with this stuff, but everyone else is better off avoiding *Street Supremacy*. | Greg Sewart

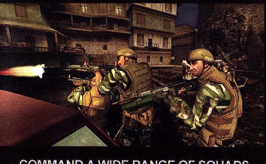
VERDICT The best ice-racing simulator for the PSP. Too bad there's no option for winter tires.

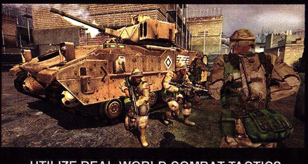
SCORE 2 | 5

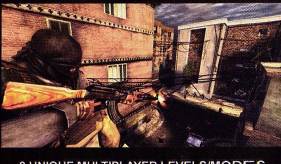
FIGHT!

Street Supremacy's races don't feature a finish line, but rather a "life bar." Like in any fighting game, when a player's life bar has depleted, that player loses the race. Your bar will go down if you're running second or you hit another car or a wall.









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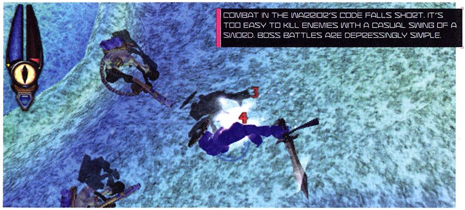

COMBAT IN THE WARRIOR'S CODE FALLS SHORT. IT'S TOO EASY TO KILL ENEMIES WITH A CASUAL SWING OF A SWORD. BOSS BATTLES ARE DEPRESSINGLY SIMPLE.

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SPECIALS
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Coven Member

Coven Member
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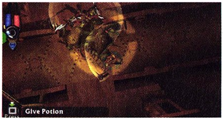


PUB. Sony Online Ent. DEV. Sony Online Ent. ESRB T MSRP $39.99

UNTOLD LEGENDS: THE WARRIOR'S CODE

KILL ME NOW—PLEASE

While a good story always improves a game, it certainly isn't a required component for enjoyment. Sometimes you just want to shoot or fight and not have to think. But if a game doesn't have a story, the onus falls on the developer that much more to make the actual combat fun. And if combat isn't there, well, things get boring pretty fast.

The big problem with *The Warrior's Code* is that the combat, while decent, offers no challenge. Monsters might come in different shapes and sizes, but it's easy to dispatch them with some casual ax swings. It doesn't matter if you rush blindly into a horde of enemies, because nine times out of 10, you'll kill them all easily. Bosses are also depressingly simple—you can beat most of them on the first try, with little to no strategy required. One of the things touted about *The Warrior's Code* is the incorporation of special attacks, but when you don't need to use them, it makes them a lot less exciting. Again, it's no fun to win when there's no challenge involved.

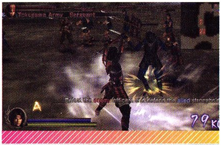
Also frustrating is that it's not always clear where you need to go—I spent a good 20 minutes wandering around an endlessly branching dungeon trying to find the correct door because there isn't a full-sized map to refer to. The story, which is generic fantasy fare, doesn't add any spice to the game. It's another tale of absolute evil taking control, with you being the lone hope of all that is good and right.

Some things have improved from the last game. Load times are thankfully a whole lot shorter than they used to be, and the graphics look better, too. The game runs pretty smoothly, but it did have points of lag. Normally, this wasn't too much of a problem, but in timed events I found myself rubbing my thumb raw on the analog stick as I tried to eke a little more speed out of my character.

Ultimately, we've seen this situation many times before. People don't play a game because it has pretty spellcasting effects or 40 different monster types. They play games to be challenged—the entertainment comes from figuring out how to overcome that challenge. Here's a challenge to the development team: Step outside of your formula and think about what makes a game worth playing. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT Formulaic and unchallenging.

SCORE 2.5 | 5



SAMURAI WARRIORS: STATE OF WAR

FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTENT

PUB. Koei DEV. Omega Force ESRB T MSRP $39.99

No company is guiltier of churning out *Dynasty Warriors* rip-offs than Koei, the series' creator. At last count, there were more than 20 versions of *DW* on at least six different platforms, and it should come as a surprise to exactly no one that Koei is working on a *DW* for the PS3. But ultimately, there's nothing wrong with a company milking its bread-and-butter franchise—as long as it finds ways to keep things fresh.

Samurai Warriors: State of War, Koei's sophomore effort on the PSP and kin to the *DW* spin-off *Samurai Warriors* on the PS2, offers an excellent example of keeping things fresh: It's a made-for-PSP game that starts with the *DW* concept, mixes in a few innovations, and takes off in a nice new direction.

Alternating between board-game strategy and the hack-n-slash action endemic to *DW* games, *State of War* sets you in the thick of feudal Japan, where you're one of 19 warlords and ninjas from the *Samurai Warriors* PS2 games.

The game begins on a chessboardlike grid of squares; your goal is to take the entire board. When you move into an enemy square, *State of War* propels you into a thumb-mashing battle that has you fighting dozens of enemies at a time. The combat is timed and goes in brief bursts; when you're finished fighting, you're back at the game board.

There's a surprising strategic depth to *State of War*. On the game board, you're able to enact a bevy of charms that you've won in your victories, charms that can be used to breach walls, poison enemies, heal your soldiers, or burn down enemy forests. *State of War*'s action sequences lack any real detail, but that's probably to keep the framerate high.

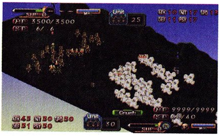
For fans of *Dynasty Warriors* and *Samurai Warriors* games, *State of War* is a no-brainer must-have. The game's nicely balanced mix of strategy and action make it one of the best overall action-strategy games for the PSP. | *Tom Byron*

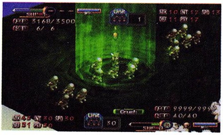
STATE OF MULTIPLAYER

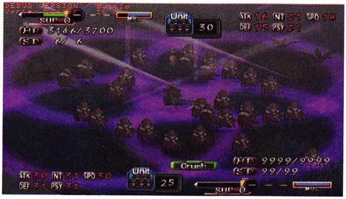
Make a point to play *State of War* in versus mode. The easy ad hoc connection allows up to four players to battle it out in two straightforward versus games that are limited in gameplay. Given how fun they are and how smooth the connection is, "limited," in this case, is good.

VERDICT An excellent action-strategy fix for the *Dynasty* and *Samurai Warriors* fan.

SCORE 4 | 5







PUB. NIS America **DEV.** Idea Factory **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

GENERATION OF CHAOS

STRATEGY LITE

Portable RPGs always seem ideal. In our busy lives, it's refreshing to take a break from the mundane to thwart the obligatory bad guy while in transit or pilfer goods while waiting for the bus. *Generation of Chaos* sure looks like it has all the right features, too: cutesy anime fighters, a complicated story you pretend to understand, and enough battles to put you into a coma. Unfortunately, behind the pretty looks lies a vast wasteland of boredom.

Chaos tries to capitalize on the successful strategy-RPG craze, and at first glance, it appears as though fans of *Disgaea* and *Phantom Brave* may have another reason to hole up. But part of the joy of playing those games is mastering their intricate combat systems. Sadly, *Chaos*' battles are the equivalent of a summer blockbuster: all flash and no substance. Sure, they look impressive—60 warriors duking it out at the same time is quite a feat, especially on the PSP's modest screen. But once you get over this fact (and I give you five minutes at the most), you'll realize there's not much to do while attacking except watch the madness run amok.

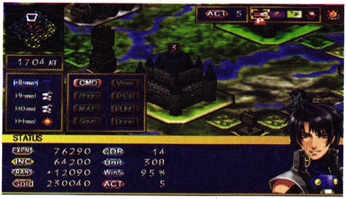
The problem is that you have little control over the combat. You have one main commander, who you can move during the skirmishes, but aside from that, you're crippled in deciding any sort of strategy other than closing your eyes and hoping your warriors took their vitamins. For an RPG that emphasizes generations of chaos, it's a shame the actual battles aren't more enjoyable.

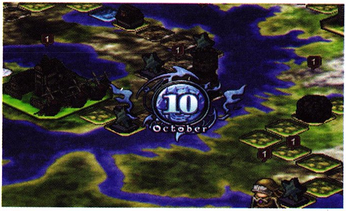
When you're not fighting, the object is to acquire loads of land on a main map (which is formatted similarly to a game board). Each chapter ends when you are able to defeat the main commander on the map. Sounds easy enough, but like *Monopoly*, it can takes days (or in the game's case, months) before you get anything accomplished.

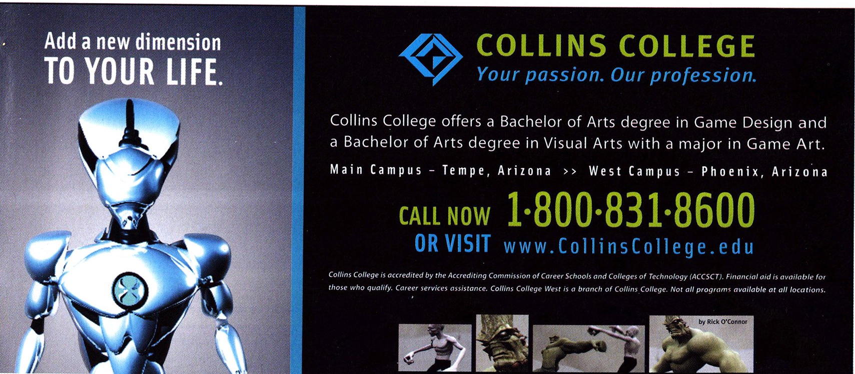
Honestly, there are better ways to waste your time, but if you're really itching for a portable ponderer, grab yourself a lawn chair and take a rain check from life. | *Michael Donahue*

VERDICT Like that hot chick at the bar—good looking but boring after five minutes.

SCORE 2.5 | 5







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by Rick O'Connor

[Zach Braff, Joan Cusack]

CHICKEN LITTLE

THE SKY IS FALLING

by john scalzi

If you want to know why Disney just paid through the nose to buy Pixar, you need look no further than *Chicken Little*, which was Disney's homegrown attempt to capture some of Pixar's computer-animated magic—and its extremely high grosses. It failed on both counts. Well, "failed" is probably too strong a word. It's a cute enough little film, a nice story about a bunch of misfit kid animals trying to save their world from alien invasion and whatnot, and it did reasonably decent business in the theaters. But, see, the film was designed to show that Disney (which is in the middle of its own creative slump with its animated film division) didn't *need* the high-octane story, money, and merchandising boost that Pixar releases offered the studio. And yeah, it really didn't do that.

Why? Because the film's got no balls. The film is, in fact, depressingly safe—it's the same bland, inoffensive, middle-of-the-road formula Disney's pounded out since it chickened out of risk-taking after *The Lion King* more than a decade ago. Pixar, on the other hand, has balls aplenty: Just look at *The Incredibles*—for my money the best superhero film yet—which is as thematically and referentially rich as any film has been in years. Pixar is making world-class *films*, not just really good animated films. There's nothing wrong with Disney making just a decent animated film for kids, mind you, but it can't compete with Pixar that way. Disney and Pixar aren't playing in the same league and haven't been for years.

So Disney bought Pixar and put Pixar's people in charge of its animation studio, and as a result I expect you'll see Disney's animation suddenly becoming relevant again. So take a good look at *Chicken Little*—in its way, it's now an endangered species.

SCORE

2|5

CAPOTE

[Philip Seymour Hoffman, Catherine Keener]

Before James Frey lied his ass off on *Oprah*, there was Truman Capote, who went to Kansas to cover the murder of a family and made the first "nonfiction novel" out of it (and did a better job telling the truth than others did covering up their lies). This film covers that chapter in Capote's life—and the moral compromises the author took—brilliantly. It's a character study of what real writing can actually require of someone's conscience.

SCORE 5 | 5

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

[Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson]

At this point in the *Harry Potter* series (the books or the movies), I wonder just how many people think it's all going to end on a high note. Daniel Radcliffe, who plays Harry, has been caught openly wondering if Harry's gonna die at the end, and while I don't think it'll be as bad as all that, as the story goes on, things just seem to get darker and darker.

This is not a complaint, however, and *Goblet of Fire* demonstrates why—because as the series gets darker, it also gets more exciting and (trimmed down as the story must be in the films) much more intense. This time around, Harry has to compete in an effects-laden tournament and along the way deal with the evil, mostly dead Voldemort, who has returned in surprisingly nasty form. In a word: excellent. I'm in for more darkness.

SCORE 4 | 5

DERAILED

[Jennifer Aniston, Clive Owen]

Jennifer Aniston tried to put a little tarnish on her good-girl image with this little thriller. Does it work? Eh. When you're trying a career rehab, it helps if the film you're in is actually one that works with you in your cause. As far as this flick goes, it's not helping out much; it's a bit flabby in the suspense department. But if all you're looking for is to admire Aniston's and Clive Owen's charms, you're golden.

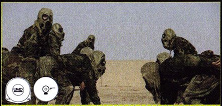
SCORE 3 | 5

GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'

[50 Cent, Terrence Howard]

Rapper 50 Cent is trying to take a page from Eminem's winning *8 Mile* formula by having his film shot by a real director (Jim Sheridan) and by fictionalizing his own troubled life story. It worked for Eminem, and it works here, too, only not as often and not as well. Part of the problem is that this story's already been told too much recently (see: *Hustle & Flow*), which is ironic, all things considered. 50 Cent does well, though.

SCORE 3.5 | 5



JARHEAD

[Jake Gyllenhaal, Jamie Foxx]

War is hell, as the saying so famously goes, but loitering around on the edge of a war is no great picnic, either. *Jarhead* is a war film with not so much war in it; instead we get Gyllenhaal and his solider buddies slowly going mad in the intense heat of the Middle East while waiting for action in the first Gulf War. Do they ever see any? And would it matter if they did? Yep, those are things to ponder, all right.

SCORE 4 | 5

GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK

[David Strathairn, George Clooney]

Undoubtedly the best film ever directed by a man who once played Batman. OK, that's snarky, but the snark takes nothing from this film, which is a smart slice of broadcast history, in which a respected journalist (Edward R. Murrow, played by Strathairn) locks horns with a demagogue in the U.S. government—and his company gets his back (mostly). A welcome reminder that newsies need to stand up for more than "shareholder value."

SCORE 5 | 5

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

[Viggo Mortensen, Maria Bello]

David Cronenberg shows why he's one of the most interesting directors working these days with this little tale of love and violence, in which a small-town diner owner stops a robbery and in the process appears to reveal that he's not who everyone thinks he is. Cronenberg understands the romance of violence better than nearly any other filmmaker, and with Mortensen as his hero, he's got someone who personifies both its appeal and danger.

SCORE 4.5 | 5

THE SQUID AND THE WHALE

[Jeff Daniels, Laura Linney]

This is one of those films in which no one is particularly nice or admirable (the two adults, both writers, are divorcing badly, and their kids are screwed up in weird ways of their own), so it has to get by through being well acted and sharply observed. It manages this very well—it's a good film—but speaking as a writer myself, I think everyone in this movie needs to have some sense slapped into them. Writers, man.

SCORE 4 | 5

DVD RELEASE

March 7
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
Jarhead

March 14
Good Night, and Good Luck.
A History of Violence

March 21
Capote
Chicken Little
Derailed
The Squid and the Whale

March 28
Get Rich or Die Tryin'

UMD RELEASE

March 7
Boyz N the Hood
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
Jarhead

March 14
American Psycho
Ice Age

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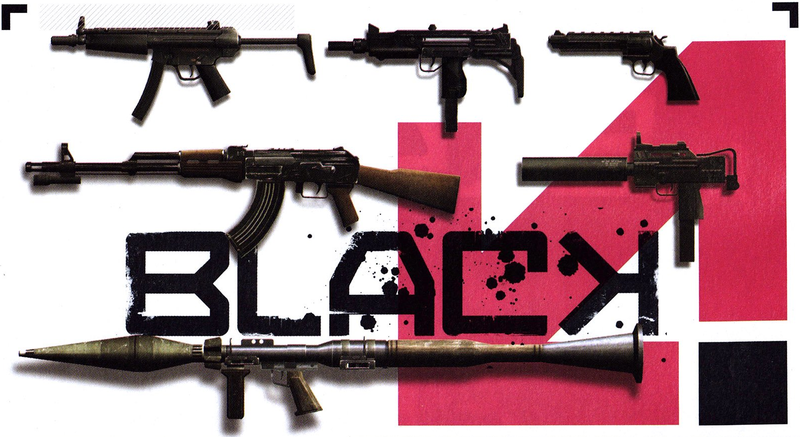


REPLAY

REVVING UP THE PLAYSTATION WAYBACK MACHINE

100

TALKING BLACK

THE DEMO, THE RUSSIANS, AND SHATNER'S FLAP

104

TACTICAL RPGS

FF TACTICS AIN'T THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

INSIDE

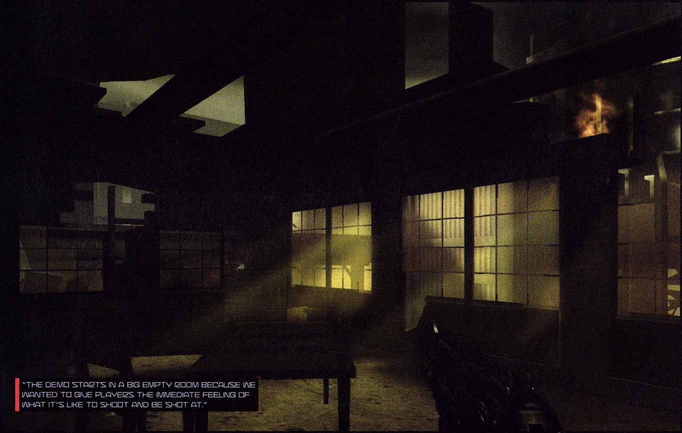
105 PS1-DERLAND
If gaming is about obsession, then tactical RPGs are the purest, most distilled expression of the art form.

106 LOCATIONFREE TV
For the low, low price of $350, you too can watch TV on your PSP. Call now! Operators are standing by.

108 LIGHT-GUN GAMES
Our point-and-shoot guide to seven PS2 games that make excellent use of the lightgun.

TALKING BLACK

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR TIPS AND COMMENTARY ON CRITERION'S PAEAN TO FIREARMS



"THE DEMO STARTS IN A BIG EMPTY ROOM BECAUSE WE WANTED TO GIVE PLAYERS THE IMMEDIATE FEELING OF WHAT IT'S LIKE TO SHOOT AND BE SHOT AT."

This issue's DVD contains an electrifying playable demo of *Black*, the first-person shooter developed by Criterion (creators of the *Burnout* series) and published by EA Games (reviewed last issue). Here, we mix in some playing tips by design lead Craig Sullivan with insights and commentary into some of the demo (and game) design decisions from producer Jeremy Chubb.

SHOOT. EVERYTHING.

CRAIG SULLIVAN The biggest tip I can give is, don't be scared to pull the trigger. Shoot—everything. *Black* is different from other FPSes. We give you lots of bullets and lots of enemies to shoot at. We also try to make sure that anything in the world you'd want to shoot, you can. Explore the world with bullets and see what you can find.

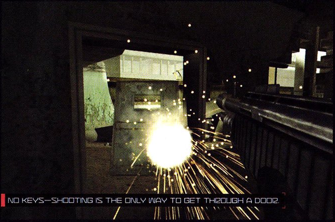
JEREMY CHUBB *Black* was inspired by Hollywood blockbusters like *The Rock*, *The Matrix*, and *True Lies*. What makes these movies so much fun is the shooting and destruction. When Arnold enters a room and sprays it down with bullets, the bad guys don't just die—windows shatter, sparks fly, smoke fills the air, and the ceiling literally comes crashing down around the enemy.

The demo starts in a big empty room because we wanted to give players the immediate feeling of what it's like to shoot and be shot at. Smash the glass in front of you, shoot up the wall! We start you off with a shotgun because we wanted to teach you early on [that] there are no keys in the game—you just blow off the hinges if you want to get through a door.

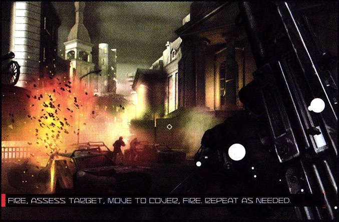
ESTABLISH YOUR PATTERN

CS Open fire, assess target, move to cover, open fire: This basic pattern is key to getting the most out of *Black*, especially in tricky situations. Most encounters are designed around the premise that at least one of the combatants (you or the enemy) is either near or behind cover, so firing into a position then advancing or retreating based on the outcome is a great tactic to use—you'll see enemies doing this also.

JC We wanted *Black* to give players the sensation of being in a real firefight. Sound is very important for this—we wanted the guns



NO KEYS—SHOOTING IS THE ONLY WAY TO GET THROUGH A DOOR.



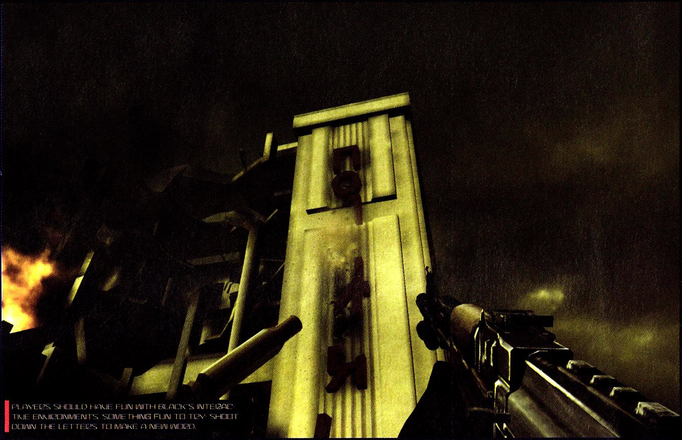
FIRE, ASSESS TARGET, MOVE TO COVER, FIRE. REPEAT AS NEEDED.

WHY RUSSIANS?

According to Jeremy Chubb, the choice of Russians as the main enemy force came down to needing believable modern-day locales in a world of counterterrorism. To clarify, it's not specifically Russia, it's a previous Soviet state; all the voices are genuine Russian, though. "We sent one of our audio guys to Moscow and sat down with some former special-forces guys, so everything you hear the enemy say in the game is really a smart response," says Chubb, "Like when you hear them yell *lemonka*, that's for lemon, and it's their nickname for grenade, like 'pineapple' is used in the States."

CRAWLING THROUGH SHATNER'S FLAP

Jeremy Chubb brings us into the inner workings of Criterion: "At its highest point, *Black* had like a hundred people on the development team. To manage this, we had an army of dev managers organizing and scheduling everything. That job's a little dry, so they find ways to spice it up. It's common for programmers to 'break' the game on the internal server, and when that happened, the game would hang and the entire team had to stop working until there was a fix. As 'punishment,' dev managers made first-time offenders wear the Sombrero of Shame. A second-time offender got the Monkey of Shame on their desk, and for third-time offenders, we had this big standee of William Shatner, and [they] had to crawl under it or 'through his flap' in public humiliation."



PLAYERS SHOULD HAVE FUN WITH BLACK'S INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS. SOMETHING FUN TO TRY: SHOOT DOWN THE LETTERS TO MAKE A NEW WORD.

to sound amazing and had to trick the PS2 into doing some things it doesn't normally do. Overall, the sound was heavily influenced by Indiana Jones' punches in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; we love that when he punches a guy, it's like a howitzer going off. It's not a punch at all; it's like this massive, booming explosion.

COVER YOURSELF

| CS Cover plays a big part in *Black*, but not in a way most players will be used to. Cover—and the environment in general—becomes part of the action. Cover is erodible—it can be blown up, injuring or killing anyone nearby (including yourself), or it can be something that falls down to crush the unwary. If you find yourself in a firefight with more than one enemy, look for a quick way to even the odds. If you think something can be destroyed, it probably can.

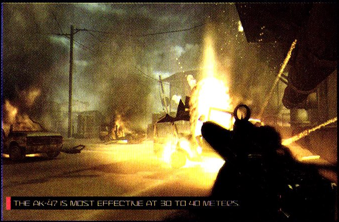
Firing "full auto" at long range sprays bullets everywhere—it's a lot of fun but it's not always the best way to take out that enemy hiding behind cover. Most weapons in the game have alternate fire modes that let you fire bursts and single shots as well as full auto. Experiment with different weapons to see what's best for each situation.

| JC This is a good time to mention that we love the AK-47, and we love it so much, we made it available early in the game. The AK is a better-suited gun for this part of the game because of the distances involved. The AK is useful at [distances of] 30 to 40 meters [about 100 to 130 feet]. Note: The word on the building is Russian for "police station." You can shoot off all the letters.

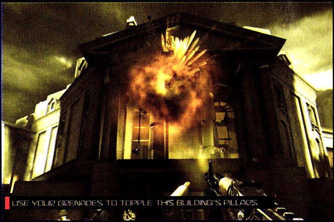
BLOW EVERYTHING UP

| CS Exploding cars are effective weapons. I've waited a long time to shoot at a car and have it react like something from a Hollywood movie. In *Black*, a firefight near a car can pan out in lots of different ways because of the way the car reacts—the tires can be shot out, the windows can be smashed, the doors can be shot off, and the car can be completely destroyed in an explosion that kills anyone nearby. There are also weak points on the car that trigger the explosions quicker than just by firing blindly at it. See if you can find them.

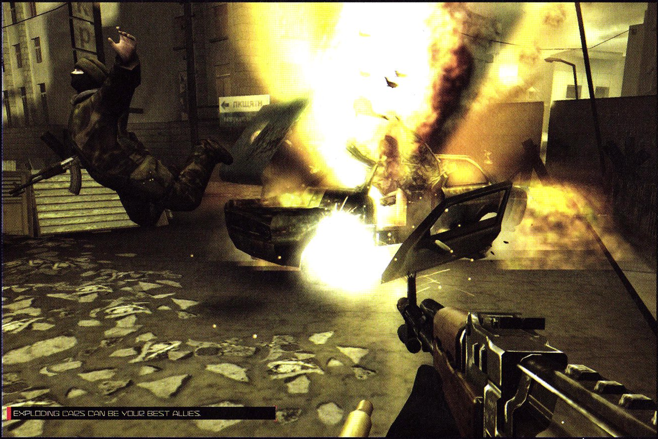
Ammo crates explode when shot, so they are worth looking out for. They kill anyone nearby and can also destroy fences, statues, columns, signs, and bits of buildings. Use your bullets and grenades



THE AK-47 IS MOST EFFECTIVE AT 30 TO 40 METERS.



USE YOUR GRENADES TO TOPPLE THIS BUILDING'S PILLARS.


EXPLODING CARS CAN BE YOUR BEST ALLIES.

to find them and even the odds. Grenades in *Black* are real action-movie stuff. When they explode, they blow out nearby windows and send enemies flying through the air. They have an effective blast radius of almost eight meters (about 26 feet), so they're great for situations where you face more than one enemy. My favorite use of the grenade is throwing it through a window and watching all the glass and any enemies get blasted out.

JC In the full game—unfortunately, not in the demo—you can shoot a grenade in midair. This becomes useful in later levels as the enemy AI gets smarter and learns to run fast from grenades.

GET A HEAD

CS A head shot is the quickest way to take out an enemy, but it also requires accuracy. I prefer to use a handgun when I'm going for head shots, but if the enemy number increases, I switch to an automatic or there's big trouble. One final tip: If you find yourself surprised by an enemy up close, take him down with a weapon butt to the face. This is much more effective than backing off and firing at him.

EXPLODING CRATES ARE YOUR SECOND-BEST ALLIES.

PLAY IT NOW!

PlayStation
BLACK
PlayStation.2

The *Black* playable demo is on this month's DVD. We recommend you give it a shot.

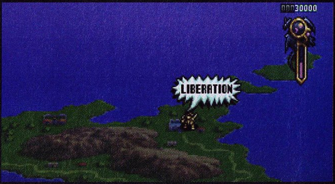
PLAYSTATION Tactics

WHEN IT COMES TO STRATEGIC RPGS ON PS1, FINAL FANTASY ISN'T THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

| Tactical RPGs have been gaining popularity in the United States since a PS1 game called Final Fantasy Tactics introduced a legion of gamers to its detail-oriented strategy. But if FFT is all you've played, you've been missing out on some of the most intense games the PS1 had to offer. Here are a few gems that no RPG fan should be without. | Jeremy Parish

OGRE BATTLE & TACTICS OGRE

Quest/Atlus, 1998



Although *FFT* is often praised for giving birth to the tactical RPG genre, that PS1 masterpiece would never have existed without this classic pair of Super NES ports. They have not only a good amount of gameplay in common with *FFT*, but staff as well—most notably their director, Yasumi Matsuno (*Vagrant Story*, *FFXII*), who created the *Ogre* series for Quest before moving on to the more lucrative pastures offered by Square.

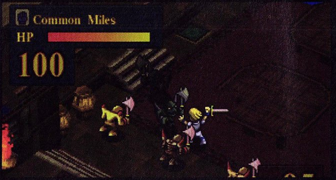
Ogre Battle is a more sweeping take on the concept, giving players indirect control of entire armies of fantastic creatures. The player is more of a battle coordinator, selecting combat units and issuing orders—not to mention managing all the army's mundane details. Simply winning battles isn't the point, though; the real goal is to win well, fighting nobly by using "good" units and never beating up on weaker armies. Players are judged on their morality and sense of justice, and the best ending is difficult to come by indeed.

Tactics Ogre, on the other hand, could well be *FFT*'s ugly twin brother. While it lacks some of the later game's technical niceties, like rotating battlefields, the differences are largely cosmetic. In some ways, *TO* is quite a bit more sophisticated than its more popular relative; battle parties are capped at 10 characters rather than *FFT*'s five, and the challenge level is considerably higher. Defeated units are more likely to stay dead, and no one gets a health recharge between consecutive battles on a single map point.

More importantly, *TO* spins a spectacular tale. Though the plot is cut from the same cloth as *FFT* with its two young friends who find themselves at odds in the midst of an epic war, *Ogre* gives players the freedom to choose their own destiny. Should you uphold your oath of loyalty and slaughter innocent villagers on your lord's command? Or is it better to follow your sense of justice and rebel? Whatever the choice, players get no easy victories—but the excellent gameplay and gripping story make every grueling fight worthwhile.

KARTIA: THE WORD OF FATE

Atlus, 1998



Kartia's big selling point was that it features art by Yoshitaka Amano—you know, the guy who did *Final Fantasy*'s artwork before the PlayStation era—and it's clear that Atlus was aiming for superhardcore Square fans who had been disenfranchised by the anime-inspired look of *FFVII*. In fact, *Kartia*'s two main characters, Toxa and Lacryma, look exactly like clones of *FFVI* characters Gau and Celes.

Beyond the superficial similarities to more popular series, though, *Kartia* is its own creature. Far more straightforward than the competition, it is nevertheless an engrossing game whose battles stand out thanks to their reliance on "phantoms," summoned creatures that can flesh out a party and help even the odds. Phantoms are no match for the human combatants, but against their own kind they're incredibly effective, especially when used in the proper rock-paper-scissors combinations.

Another unique facet of *Kartia* is that it's divided into two chapters, each starring a different character. Only by completing the game from both Toxa's and Lacryma's perspectives does the full tale unfold. Unlike most other PS1 tactical games, *Kartia* sells for reasonable prices these days—so it's definitely worth tracking down.

FRONT MISSION 3

Square EA, 2000

The *Front Mission* series has been around for a while, but it wasn't until the third chapter that it arrived in America. This is your quintessential tactical roleplayer, but its futuristic setting gives it a different feel than the usual fantasy fare. Its complex story line is augmented by the ability to research on the Internet—and best of all, the stars of the game are giant robot suits. Of course, the pilots are at the heart of the story, but they're mostly on hand to advance the plot (and get squished when they're forced to eject from a ruined mech suit). *FM3* can feel a little drawn out, but fans of hulking battle bots will be too blissed out to notice.

> IT'S AN ENGROSSING GAME WHOSE BATTLES STAND OUT.

RHAPSODY

Atlus, 2000

Cornet
Lv. 1 HP 127 24
MP 25/ 25
Move
Attack
Horn
Reward
Item
Escape

In all fairness, *Rhapsody* isn't quite "great." The gameplay barely qualifies as tactical, the quest is brief, and the difficulty is practically nonexistent. It mostly sells on its novelty—what other game stops for Disney-esque musical numbers and lets you annihilate enemies with a full stack of pancakes? But what makes it truly valuable is the fact that it was the first Nippon Ichi game to come to the United States. Those brilliant PS2 RPGs like *Disgaea* and *Makai Kingdom* have their roots here...in fact, *Phantom Brave* even has some *Rhapsody* cameos. *Rhapsody* briefly commanded insane prices on eBay, but a recent reissue has helped tone down the gougery. Which is good, since it's a charming little RPG but hardly worth a hundred bucks. |

THE REST

VANDAL HEARTS I & II

Konami's *Vandal Hearts* netted a fair amount of attention by virtue of being the first PS1 tactical RPG to reach American soil. While the graphics are absolutely god-awful, the action is pretty solid, falling firmly into the mold cast by the *Shining Force* series. The sequel isn't quite as good of a game, but it *is* much easier on the eyes.

HOSHIGAMI: RUINING BLUE EARTH

Hoshigami is Japanese for "star god," just like *Stella Deus* is the Latin translation. It's not a random coincidence—the two games are incredibly similar, having come from the same creators. Reactions to this one tend to be mixed, but it's worth a look if you dig its PS2 counterpart.

SAIYUKI

Another game based loosely on the *Journey to the West* legend, *Saiyuki* mercifully has nothing whatsoever to do with the pretty-boy anime by the same name. It's generic but reasonably entertaining.

VANGUARD BANDITS

This unusually ho-hum game from the late Working Designs is far from worthless, but it didn't really stand up to its competition.

ARC THE LAD COLLECTION

The *Arc* games straddle the line between standard and tactical RPGs, but the second game in the series is so fantastic that we're going to allow it. And since you can now buy it as part of a package deal that includes both its predecessor and sequel, it's hard to pass up.

ETERNAL EYES

Sunsoft released this one as part of its $10 software line, and it plays exactly like you'd expect a $10 RPG to. Avoid it!

PS1-DERLAND

TACTICAL RETREAT

By Jeremy Parish

When he's not trying to reclaim his vanished youth with obsolete games, Jeremy works as 1UP.com's features editor and charming mascot. Check out his blog at toastyfrog.1UP.com.

There's just something about videogames that seems to light the fires of obsession in people. The madness has been built into the medium from the start: the drive to master *Pac-Man* patterns, to burn every bush in Hyrule, or to just finally catch 'em all.

But there's something about tactical RPGs that *really* brings out the compulsive side of gamers. Aside from maybe massively multiplayer games, nothing the industry can throw at us has the power to take control of lives like the word "tactics." The current champions of the genre are the fine folks at Nippon Ichi, whose cult hits include *Disgaea* and *Makai Kingdom*—each seemingly predicated on the idea that it should be the only game you have time to play in a given year.

The "tactical thinking" thing has been around for a while, but it didn't really catch on until someone slapped the *Final Fantasy* name on it. *Final Fantasy Tactics* was the world's first widely successful tactical RPG, though plenty of other games tested the water first. *FFT* owed a serious debt to Sega (*Shining Force*) and Nintendo (*Famicom Wars* and *Fire Emblem*), not to mention Quest, whose *Ogre Battle* and *Tactics Ogre* were kissing cousins to Ramza Beoulve and his god-slaying crew.

Regardless of the game's lineage, a whole generation of gamers—myself included—discovered the joys of number crunching with *FFT*. Suddenly, finishing an RPG was no longer a matter of lining up and trading hits! You had to worry about location, movement, and altitude. You had to pay attention to the order in which your characters moved and how long it took to perform a complex action. You had to worry about your characters' faith in magic, their jobs, their skills, even their birth sign.

> NOTHING TAKES CONTROL LIKE THE WORD "TACTICS."

Suddenly, commanding your warriors was less like an adventure and more like picking up someone at a bar.

All these added layers of complexity meant more for gamers to obsess over. As if *FFT*'s intricate (and confusingly translated) story weren't enough to fixate on, its varied character-building options inspired countless fans to explore the game's depths in almost pornographic detail. When *FFT* arrived, I spent two weeks doing little besides playing the game and going to classes. (Although I was less aggressive about seeing to my classes than I was about liberating Ivalice.) That was a lot of time to spend sitting in front of a TV screen crunching numbers, but it was nothing compared to the extremes others went to.

Within weeks of the game's release, players had found novel ways to exploit the math that provides *Tactics'* foundation. Want to bend the magic system to your will? Or find a way to tweak the random elements of the immense Deep Dungeon bonus mode in your favor? Or poach every secret item? The FAQs to do it are out there—and then some. When breaking the game got boring, some gamers turned to creating insane challenges for themselves, like beating the game with only the main character or without learning any alternate jobs.

If gaming is about obsession, then tactical RPGs are the purest, most distilled expression of the art form. At the very least, *FFT* introduced us all to a good way to kill some time during those long, long months of periodic unemployment that are all the rage in America these days. |

WIRELESS COUCH POTATO

SONY'S LOCATIONFREE ADD-ON LETS YOU WATCH TV ON THE PSP!

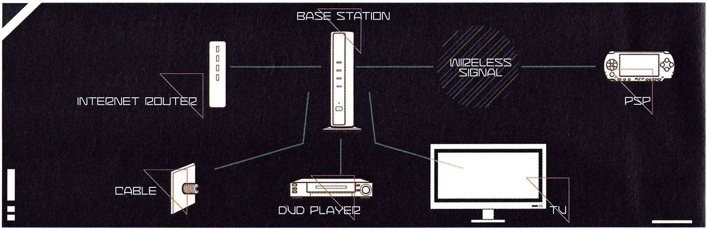
For tech-heads who get hot and bothered thinking about the media capabilities of Sony's portable platform, the 2.50 PSP firmware upgrade contains a little-publicized piece of software that supports the company's latest high-tech doodad: the LocationFree Player Pak.

For the low, low retail price of $349.99 (which is only a mere $100 more than the PSP itself!), the LocationFree Player Pak turns your PSP—and if you're so inclined, your home PC—into a wireless TV tuner. Just jack the LocationFree Base Station into your Internet router, connect it to a television, cable box, or other external video device, and tinker with the PSP's built-in LocationFree Player software (see below for details on how to get things all set up). You'll be enjoying the new episode of *Lost* from a table at your friendly neighborhood Starbucks before you know it.

As cool a concept as it is, untethered TV doesn't come without its downsides. Assuming you can deal with the fact that you're watching it on a relatively tiny monitor, the picture quality isn't bad—but don't expect UMD-caliber output either. Also bear in mind that the broadcast lags by a good three seconds or so...and don't be too shocked by the occasional stutter.

Even with its relative few shortcomings, the LocationFree Player Pak does an admirable job of wirelessly streaming audio and video to the PSP. Should you spring for it? The answer basically comes down to whether you can afford it—$350 is no small chunk of change. With that kind of cash, you could buy a new TV. Or a plane ticket to Hawaii. Or, one of these days, a PS3. Rich couch potatoes, rejoice—everyone else, stick to UMDs for your on-the-go video fix. | *Ryan Scott*

LOCATIONFREE PSP FOR DUMMIES



The LocationFree PSP quick-start documentation found on Sony's support website (products.sel.sony.com/locationfreetv/owners/documentation.html) can be a little hard to follow, so we've put together our own:

1. CONNECT EVERYTHING

Plug the Base Station into an outlet, hook it up to your Internet router, connect it to the A/V output on one or more video devices (using either a coaxial cable or a red/white/yellow A/V cable), position the Base Station's IR blaster near your video device's infrared receiver, and hit the power button.

2. CONFIGURE THE PSP'S LOCATIONFREE PLAYER

Make sure your PSP's wireless LAN switch is on and boot up the LocationFree Player found in the PSP's Network menu. Hit the setup mode button on the back of the Base Station and follow your PSP's onscreen prompts—this should create a new "LocationFree AP" network connection. Once the LocationFree Player syncs with the Base Station, cycle through the available video inputs (using the Select button) until you find the one that your device is hooked to.

3. SET UP THE REMOTE CONTROL

Now comes the tricky part. You can configure the LocationFree Player to recognize a variety of set-top boxes from several different manufacturers. The trouble is, this remote control data doesn't come preloaded—and unless you've got a wireless router, the documentation provides no direction as to how to install it. If you can download it directly, great; if not, hop onto a PC, browse to remote.locationfree.sony.net/psp/download.cgi, and grab the remote control data file (lfrmc_us.lfr). Open up your PSP in USB mode and copy this file to the PSP\SYSTEM\LFPLAYER folder (if this path doesn't exist, just go ahead and create it yourself), then start the LocationFree Player up again. Presto! Now select your video device from a list of manufacturers, which enables you to change channels, navigate DVDs, and even power your set-top box on and off.

4. TV ON THE GO

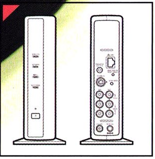
Select the Base Station Settings option from the LocationFree Player's Settings menu, log in using the default username (lfx) and password (printed on the Base Station's side), then carefully follow the instructions in the Easy Setup menu to fetch a unique dynamic IP address for your Base Station. Congratulations—you can now watch TV from any wireless access point your heart desires.

SONY
WIRELESS
NETWORK
RETAV
SETUP MODE

getting creative

JUST THINK OF ALL THE WAYS TO USE THIS TECHNOLOGY!

- Since the Base Station comes with three input devices (one coaxial and two A/V), you can jack in your TV, cable box, and DVD player. With some careful positioning of the IR blaster, you could have yourself a handy universal remote.
- Got a DVD player with a multidisc changer? Pop in some music CDs, set them to shuffle, and your PSP suddenly becomes a streaming audio jukebox.
- Imagine all the possibilities for annoying Internet hoaxes! Just hook the Base Station into your PS2, fire up your copy of *Shadow of the Colossus*, and have a digital camera ready to capture the "evidence."



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WAY OF THE GUN

LET THERE BE LIGHTGUNS

All input devices aren't created equal. While joysticks, D-pads, analog sticks, and buttons get the job done, they are all far removed from the actions they trigger in games. (Case in point: Pressing a button to punch someone in the face is nothing like actually punching someone in the face.)

But with a lightgun, you know exactly what to do: Just point the gun and shoot. The simple fun offered by the light-gun genre has kept it around (though its entries are dwindling) in this era of controller complexity. Plus, sometimes you just wanna shoot stuff up. Here's the scoop on what's out there for the PS2.

Illustration: Mark Wasyl

RESIDENT EVIL: DEAD AIM

The mutant offspring of intergenre breeding, *Dead Aim* is a bizarre combination of *Resident Evil's* well-worn survival-horror formula and cap-poppin' light-gun action. Unfortunately, the game leans heavily on the survival-horror side of its family tree; the zombies are scarce, and the ammo is scarcer. Worse, narcoleptic puzzles interrupt the action. The last thing anyone wants from a light-gun game is to push around Ming vases. The game's weird control scheme, which uses the D-pad on the back of the gun to move your character, is all kinds of clunky.

VAMPIRE NIGHT

Game Designer A: "How about a zombie shooting game?" **Game Designer B**: "It's been done." **GDA**: "Werewolf shooting game?" **GDB**: "It's been done." **GDA**: "Vampire shooting game?" **GDB**: "Now that's fresh!" Yes, it's yet another creepy-creature-filled shooting gallery, but this one has a stellar pedigree. Put together by a team of Sega and Namco light-gun aficionados (the two companies are synonymous with sore trigger fingers), *Vampire Night* is a polished and tuned-up shootin' machine. It might not bring any spectacular new gimmicks, but it's perfectly paced and blessed with good looks. Unlike many shoot-em-ups, *Vampire Night* emphasizes sharpshooting by creating pinpoint weak spots on enemies that require a sniper's steady hand to hit. And the game may just have the worst voice acting ever put to disc, a real feat.

DINO STALKER

See *Resident Evil: Dead Aim* above. OK, now replace the zombies with dinosaurs and the semicoherent zombie-plague plot with some nonsense about a time-traveling WWII soldier. *Dino Stalker* is another failed experiment in mixing light-gun shooting with a fully controllable character. The idea is promising, but the follow-through leaves much to be desired.

NINJA ASSAULT

Ninjas, those ambitious upstarts intent on spreading their stealth-killing ways into every game genre, have finally stalked their way into a light-gun game. What's next, ninja basketball? Apparently, they've revised the curriculum at ninja college, as these ninjas forgo throwing stars in favor of pistols. Aside from the novelty of the premise, *Ninja Assault* is a run-of-the-mill arcade shooter that's on rails and out of ideas. And boy is it ugly.

TIME CRISIS II AND TIME CRISIS

The big problem with light-gun games is the gun itself. With both hands on a pistol, you've got no way to control what happens onscreen (other than blowing stuff to bits). Because of this limited interactivity, gun games always roll along on autopilot, whisking you down a roller-coaster track of scripted events. The *Time Crisis* series cleverly broke that mold with a simple tweak: the ability to take cover. By using a button on the side of the gun, you can dodge anything (bullets, grenades, the occasional overpass) thrown your way. *Time Crisis* avoids the canned feel of its peers while throwing in some of the most exciting and creative action sequences in the genre.

TIME CRISIS: CRISIS ZONE

Crisis Zone utilizes the same "duck" button feature found in *Time Crisis* and *Time Crisis II*, but the game is a whole different beast. Here, a machine gun takes the place of the usual pistol, a big addition that turns the entire game into a machine-gun fetishist's destructive fantasy. The depth of previous *Time Crisis* games is sacrificed for the pure thrill of shooting up everything in sight, including a video store, a mall food court, and lots of heavily armored dudes. The arcade game came strapped with a heavy machine-gun controller that recoiled like a jackhammer, adding a real visceral thrill. But when you play at home with the lightweight plastic gun, your attention quickly turns to how ridiculously easy the game is.

ENDGAME

In the limited world of the light-gun genre, the greatest sin a game can commit is blandness. It needs vampires, zombies, or ninjas...anything but nondescript dudes with guns. Unfortunately, *Endgame* goes the generic route with a steady stream of vanilla-flavored levels, characters, and situations. Not recommended.

OLD SCHOOL

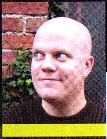
Though you'll need an original GunCon to play them (as opposed to the orange GunCon 2), plenty of great light-gun games grace the original PlayStation's library. Here are a few of the best.

POINT BLANK 1, 2, AND 3

The *Point Blank* series delivers just about the most fun you can have with a lightgun. Presented as a set of carnival-midway-style minigames, *Point Blank* is all about speed, accuracy, and competition. The games, which are all very simple, have you hitting blue targets while avoiding red targets, shooting the apple off of someone's head with a single bullet, destroying a car, and so on. But if you add a second gun, *Point Blank* turns into a killer party game with tournament modes that call for passing the guns around the room. And unlike the dark, gritty style of most of the games on this list, *Point Blank* presents itself with heaps of colorful Japanese whimsy.

ELEMENTAL GEARBOLT

Another light-gun title that strays from the beaten path, *Elemental Gearbolt* gets its chops from sci-fi and fantasy imagery. Of course, most people today would have a hard time getting beyond the game's dated, early-3D graphics. Fortunately, the game beneath the pixelated mess is still worth playing, pumping out streams of weirdo creatures like some kind of light-gun-enabled *Galaga*.



JOE RYBICKI has learned over his almost 10 years at *OPM* (and its predecessor, *PSX*) that system launches make him as giddy as a newborn lamb. Want to fight about it? Sent your thoughts to opm@ziffdavis.com.

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19

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49

Capcom USA Inc.
www.capcom.com
112

Collins College
www.collinscollege.edu
95

Eidos Interactive, Inc
www.eidos.com
6-7, 14-15, 37, 50a-50b

Electronic Arts
www.ea.com
4-5

Full Sail Real World Education
www.fullsail.com
107

Koei Corporation
www.koei.com
59

Konami America
www.konami.com
91

Midway Games, Inc.
www.midway.com
39

Myelin Media
www.mtv.com/games/holdem/stacked/
57

Namco Hometek
www.namco.com
demo, 27, 53

Office for National Drug Control Policy
www.whatsyourantidrug.com
87

SanDisk
www.sandisk.com
41

Sony Computer Entertainment
www.scea.com
2-3, 31

Sony Online Entertainment
www.sonyonline.com
cover poster, 15, 25

Square Enix U.S.A., Inc.
www.square-enix-usa.com
79, 81, 83, 84-85

THQ Inc.
www.thq.com
92, 93, 111

Ubisoft Entertainment
www.ubisoft.com
35

U.S. Army Accessions Command
www.goarmy.com
43

XSeed JKS, Inc.
www.xseedgames.com
20-21

IN MY DAY...

I WANT TO BELIEVE

Memory is a thin, fragile thing—especially for gamers. We get so hyped up on the newest or the next that we forget our history. Even recent memories get carried away on a wave of ever-improving technology. Don't believe me? Hit any gamer message board and look for comments on the PlayStation 3 demos that have been shown so far.

From the moment these demos were shown, we jaded, forgetful gamers have been hunting for every little crack, every little weak spot, to jam home the crowbar of skepticism and tear the whole unbelievable structure apart. "We know games," we say to the world, "and these cannot possibly be games. These must be tricks, manufactured to lure us close enough for the killing stroke of disappointment. After all, remember those PS2 demos!"

You see that a lot: "Remember the PS2 demos?" There's rarely elaboration; it's assumed that all are in agreement that the demos of PS2 technology in the lead-up to the system's launch promised a quality—at least graphically—that was never delivered. Because we've forgotten.

Or perhaps it's better to say we've embellished our memories. We remember not the actual appearance of those demos, but the way they made us *feel*. We remember the wonder more than the reality. Look at these images. There's not a single one that the PS2 has not matched—or surpassed—in a real, live, running game.

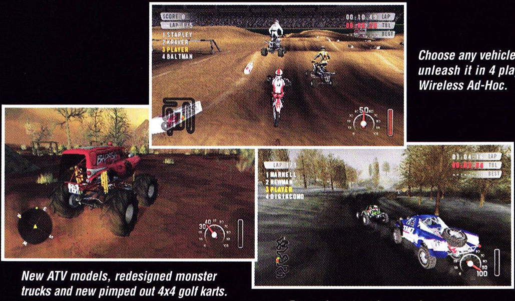
Perhaps we also remember too well the disappointment of the very first round of games and the complaints of "jaggies" and poor framerates and all those things we didn't think we'd have to deal with anymore. We would have been justified thinking at the time that those tech demos were *so totally faked up*. But eventually, they were proven legit—conservative, even.

We remember that disappointment, I expect, and want to protect ourselves from that kind of emotional trauma. So we build our walls of skepticism. But I want to believe. I'm looking for something to blow my mind, and I'm willing to accept that game designers don't want to mislead us about what to expect on PS3. Now, of course I'm not saying that every demo shown so far is of actual in-game footage, nor do I expect that every game demoed will turn out exactly the same as what we've seen. And I certainly don't think we'll see the best the PS3 has to offer right out of the gate.

But I've heard things, promising things, from people who have had firsthand experience with the system. I've heard some of the most impressive demos described as "totally attainable." And I've pored over those demos of the PS2—which now look so very quaint, however mind-blowing they may have been at the time—and compared them to the very real appearance of games like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* or *Metal Gear Solid 3* or *Black*. I want to believe, and I think there's reason to. But I dunno. Maybe I'm forgetting something. |

DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

To those parties attempting to recreate the stunts contained in the new MX vs. ATV: On The Edge we offer this message: DON'T. While that seems fairly obvious to most, you'd be surprised how many people will contemplate emulating its dangerous intensity, vis-á-vis the realistic head-to-head racing experience. Ergo, THQ and Rainbow Studios put forth the following caveats to all parties: Do not attempt to make a golf cart do 70 mph, nor launch a sand rail over a moving plane. Moreover, do not undertake the recreation of any and all stunts from MX vs. ATV: On The Edge in order to replicate its realistic rag-doll physics. The insane stunts and fierce racing is intended for the sole intent and purpose of an intense gaming experience, not for the discovery of clever ways to inflict bodily harm. Case in point, THQ and Rainbow Studios offer this photo as reference of the projected outcome of ignoring this warning. Honestly, what was this guy thinking? Said driver wasn't anywhere close to successfully completing the jump, nor is the other side of the canyon he was attempting to reach even in the aforementioned photo. In summation, MX vs. ATV: On The Edge is not real, don't attempt to make it real.



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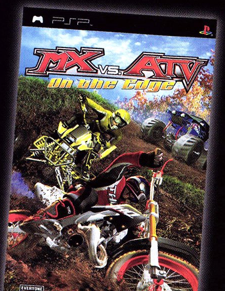

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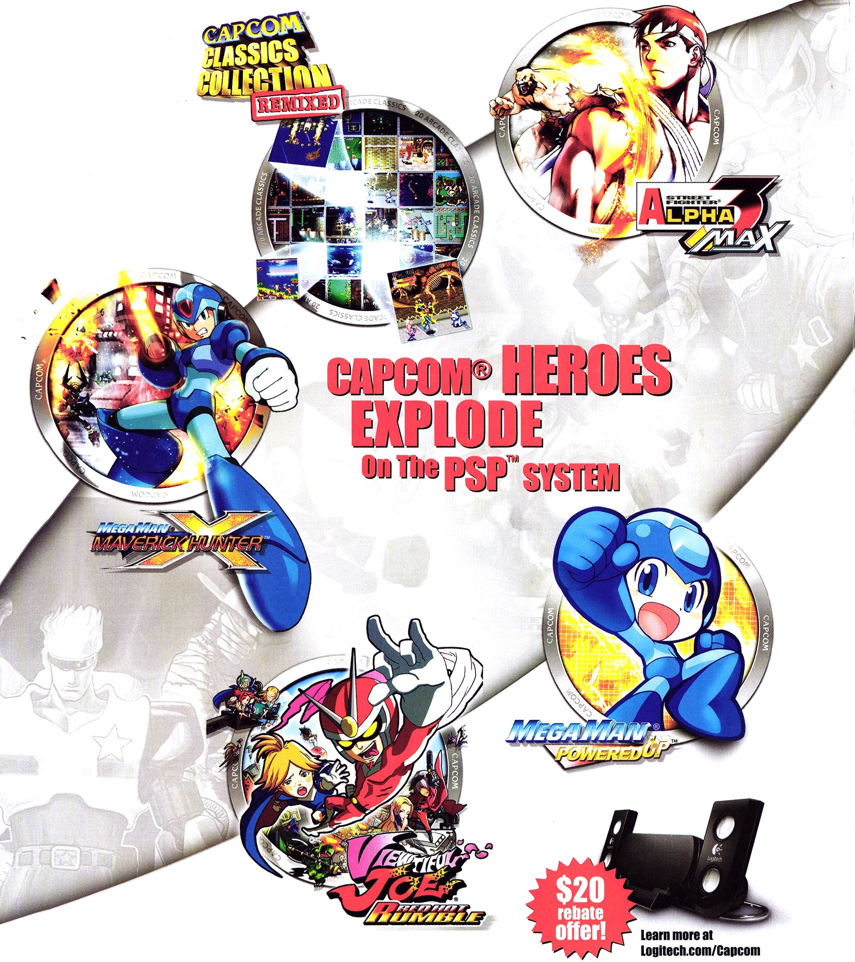
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